# *the* PARIS REVIEW

6

ALBERTO
MORAVIA
an interview

Nathan Asch

Claude-Antoine
Ciccione

Cecil Hemley

Italo Calvino

Nine drawings
by
Zao-Wou-Ki

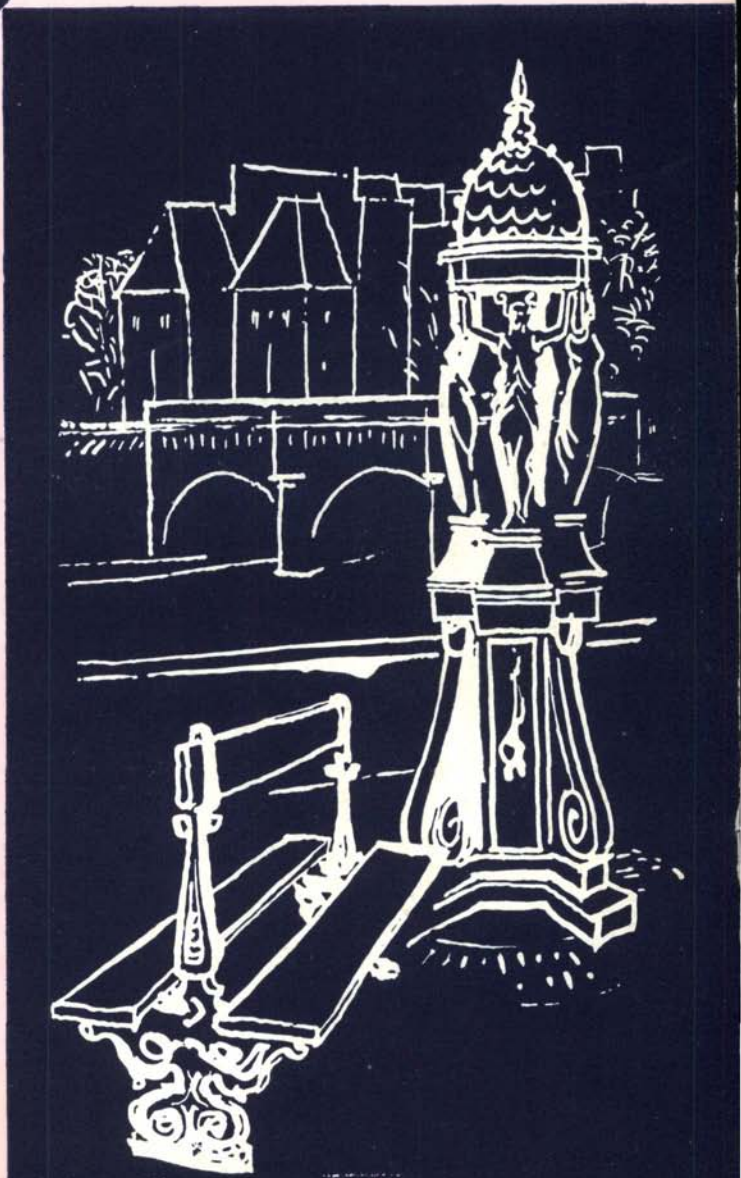
Short Stories

Poetry

Commentaries

SUMMER

*1954*



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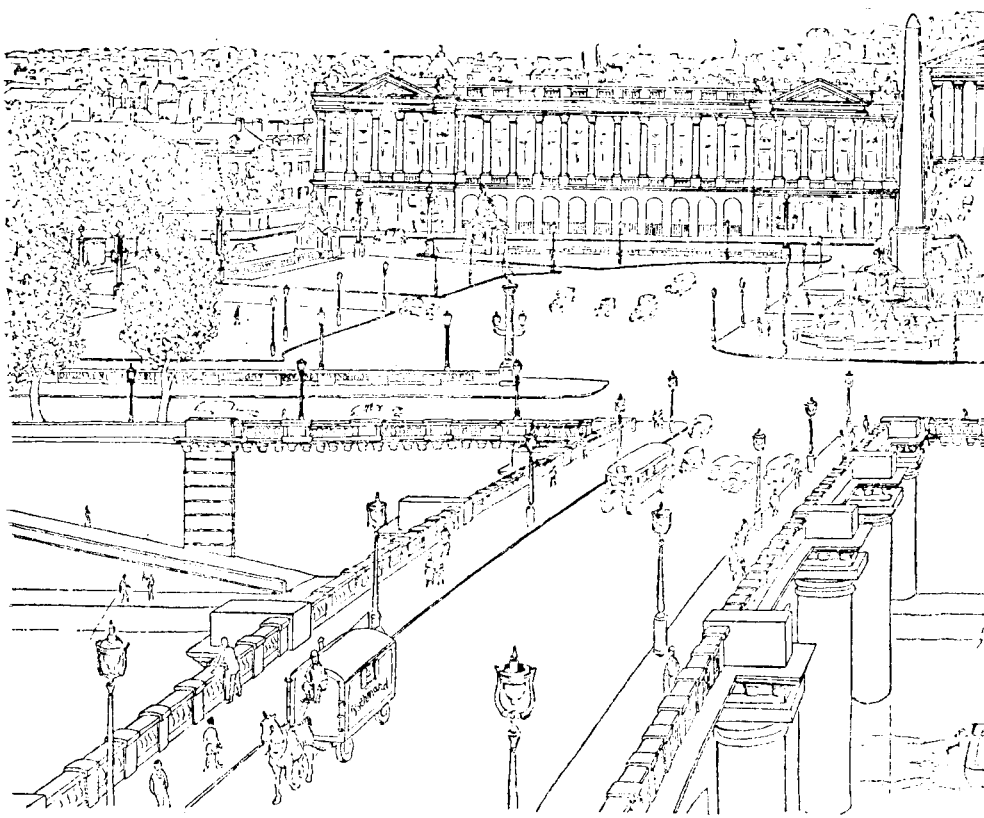

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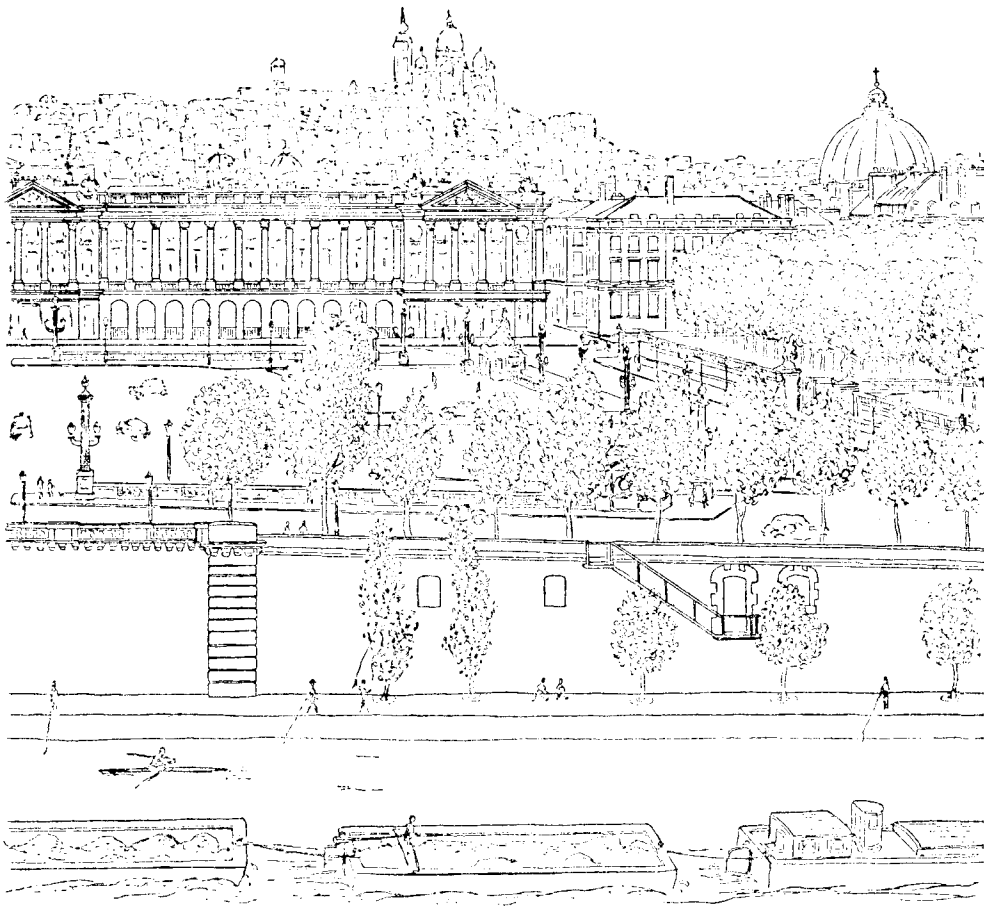

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*(Cover by Fred Jessup. Frontispiece by William Pène du Bois).*

ERRATUM: An example of the vagaries resulting from printing abroad occurred in the last issue of this magazine. Finding some 18 extra lines on the composing table, the printer neatly inserted them at the start of the press-run in a poem entitled *The Visitors* by Patrick Bowles. The lines were not by Mr. Bowles, but by one Christopher Logue, and are the lines in the fourth stanza beginning "I who was born to believe in the power of law," through to "On the tongue in the mouth of a tapestried serf." Both poems, in their correct form, will be published again in a future issue.

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ITALO CALVINO
*Translated by Ben Johnson*

# LAST COMES THE RAVEN

THE stream was a net of limpid, delicate ripples, with the water running through the mesh. From time to time, like a fluttering of silver wings, the dorsum of a trout flashed on the surface, the fish at once plunging zigzag down into the water.

—Full of trout, one of the men said.

—If we toss a grenade in, they'll all come floating to the top, bellies up, said the other; he detached a grenade from his belt and started to unscrew the baseplate.

Then the boy, who had stood aside looking on, walked over, a mountain youth with an apple-look to his face. —Let me have it, he said, taking the rifle from one of the men. —What does he want to do? the man said, intending to re-claim the rifle. But the boy was levelling it at the water, in search of a target, it seemed. "If you shoot, you'll only scare the fish away," the man started to say, but did not have time. A trout had surfaced, flashing, and the boy had pumped a bullet into it as though having anticipated the fish's exact point of appearance. Now, with its white underside exposed, the trout floated lifeless on the surface. —Cripes, the men said. The boy reloaded the rifle and swung it around. The air was crisp and tensed: one could distinguish the pine needles on the opposite bank and the knitted texture of the stream. A ripple broke the surface: another trout. He fired: now it floated dead. The men glanced briefly at the fish, briefly at the boy. —He shoots well, they said.

The boy swung the barrel again, into the air. It was curious, to think of it, that they were encompassed by air,



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actually cut off from other things by meters of air. But when the boy aimed the rifle, the air then became an invisible straight line stretching from the muzzle to the thing...to the hawk, for instance, floating above on wings that seemed scarcely to move. As he pressed the trigger, the air continued crystalline and clear as ever, but at the upper end of the line the kestrel folded its wings, then dropped like a stone. The open breech emitted a fine smell of powder.

He asked for more cartridges. The number of men watching had now swelled behind him on the bank of the stream. The cones at the top of the pine trees on the other bank—why were they visible and withal out of reach? Why that empty span between him and them? Why were the cones, although a part of him, in the chamber of his eye—why were they *there*, so distant? And yet if he aimed the rifle that empty span was clearly a deception: he touched the trigger and at that instant a cone, severed at the stem, fell. The feeling was one of caressive emptiness: the emptiness of the rifle bore which extended off into the air and was occupied by the shot, straight to the pine cone, the squirrel, the white stone, the flowering poppy. —He doesn't miss a one, the men said, and no one had the audacity to laugh.

—Come, come along with us, the leader said. —You give me the rifle then, the boy returned. —All right. Certainly.

So he went.

He left with a haversack filled with apples and two rounds of cheese. His village was a patch of slate, straw, and cattle muck in the valley bottom. And going away was wonderful, for at every turn there was something new to be seen, trees with cones, birds flitting among the branches, lichen-encrusted rocks, everything in the shaft of the false distances, of the distances occupied by gunshot that gulped up the air between. But he wasn't to shoot, they told him: those were places to be passed in silence, and the cartridges were for fighting. But at a certain point a leveret, frightened by the footsteps, scampered across the trail, amid shouts and the bustle of the men. It was just about to vanish into the brake when the boy stopped it with a shot. —A good shot, the leader him-

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self conceded, —but this is not a pleasure hunt. You're not to shoot again, even if you see a pheasant.

But scarcely an hour had elapsed before there were more shots from the column.

—It's the boy again! the leader stormed, going forward to overtake him.

The boy grinned with his rosy and white apple-face.

—Partridges, he said, displaying them. They had burst up from a hedge.

—Partridges, crickets or whatever else, I gave you fair warning. Now let me have the rifle. And if you make me lose my temper once more, back to the village you go.

The boy sulked a little; it was no fun to be hiking without a rifle, but as long as he remained with them he might hope to have it again.

In the night they bedded down in the chalet of herdsmen. The boy awakened immediately the sky grew light, while the others still slept. He took their finest rifle and loaded his haversack with cartridges and went out. The air was timorous and crisp, as one may discover it in the early morning. Not far from the house stood a mulberry tree. It was the hour in which jays were arriving. There, he saw one! He fired, ran to pick it up, and stuffed it into his haversack. Without moving from where the jay had fallen, he looked about for another target. A dormouse! Startled by the first shot, it was scurrying toward safety in the crown of a chestnut tree. Dead, it was simply a large mouse with a grey tail that shed shocks of fur at touch. From beneath the chestnut tree he sighted, in a field off below him, a mushroom, red with white prickles and poisonous. He crumbled it with a shot, then went to see if really he had got it. What fun it was, going from one target to another like that: one might in time go all the way round the world! He spied a large snail on a rock; he sighted on its shell, and going over to it noticed nothing but the shattered rock and a spot of iridescent spittle. Thus did he wander from the chalet, down through unfamiliar fields.

From the stone he saw a lizard on a wall, from the wall a

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puddle and a frog, from the puddle a signboard on the zig-zagging road, and beneath it: beneath it men in uniform advancing on him with arms at the ready. When the boy came forth with his rifle, smiling, his face rosy and white like an apple, they shouted, raising their guns. But the boy had already seen and fired at one of the gold buttons on the chest of one of them. He heard the man scream and then bullets, in a hail and single shots, whistling over his head: he had already flattened to the ground behind a pile of rocks on the hem of the road, in a dead angle. The rock pile was long and he could move about; and he was able to peep out from unexpected points, see the flash of the soldiers' musketry, the grey and gloss of their uniforms, and fire at a chevron, at an insigne. Then quickly scramble along the ground to fire from a new position.

Then he heard a burst of fire behind him, raking over his head into the ranks of the soldiers: his companions had appeared on the rescue with machine guns. —If the boy hadn't awakened us with his firing...they were saying.

Covered by his companions, the boy was better able to see. Suddenly a bullet grazed his cheek. He turned: a soldier had got to the road above him. He threw himself into the drainage ditch, gaining shelter again, at the same time firing; the bullet, though failing to hit the soldier, glanced off his riflestock. Now, from the sounds that he heard, he could tell that his adversary's rifle had jammed; the soldier flung it to the ground. Then the boy rose up. The soldier had taken to his heels and the boy fired at him, popping an epaulette into the air.

The boy gave chase. The soldier dashed into the woods, at first vanishing but presently reappearing within range. The boy burned a crease in the dome of the soldier's helmet, next shot off a belt loop. One after the other, they had meanwhile come into a dale, to which they were both of them strangers, and where the din of the battle was no longer heard. In time, the soldier found himself without any more trees before him, instead a glade overgrown with knotted

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thicket clumps. And the boy was himself about to come out of the woods.

In the middle of the clearing stood a large rock. The soldier barely made it, jumping behind and doubling up with his head between his knees. There, for the time being, he felt, he was out of danger: he had some grenades with him, and the boy would have to maintain a respectful distance; he could do no more than keep him pinned down with his rifle, insuring that he did not escape. Certainly, had it been possible for him simply to dive into the thickets, he would be safe, able then to slide down the heavily bearded slope. But there was that open tract to cross. How long would the boy wait? And would he continue to keep his rifle trained on him? The soldier decided to try an experiment: he put his helmet on his bayonet and stuck it out from behind the rock. There was a shot and the helmet, pierced through, bowled along the ground.

The soldier kept his wits; doubtless, aiming at the rock and the area around it was quite easy, but the soldier would not get hit if he was nimble enough. Just then a bird raced overhead, a hoopoe perhaps. One shot and it fell. The soldier wiped sweat from around his neck. Another bird, a missel thrush, went over: it fell too. The soldier swallowed. This was very likely a flyway; for other birds continued to go over, all of them different, and as the boy fired, they fell. A thought came to the soldier: "If he's watching birds, then he can't be watching me. Just as he fires I'll jump for the bushes." But it might be well to test his plan first. He picked up his helmet and placed it back on the tip of his bayonet. Two birds flew over this time: snipes. Waiting, the soldier regretted wasting so fine an occasion on the test. The boy fired at one of the snipes; the soldier raised his helmet. A second shot rang out and he saw the helmet leap into the air. The soldier's mouth tasted of lead; he had no sooner noticed this than the second bird fell. He must not lose his head: behind the rock with his grenades, he was safe. And why then, even though hidden, couldn't he try to get the boy with a grenade? He lay on his back and,

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bewaring not to be seen, stretched back his arm, primed his strength, and pitched the grenade. A good throw; it would go some distance; but describing only half of a parabola, still in mid-air, it was exploded by a rifle blast. The soldier flattened himself against the ground to escape the shrapnel.

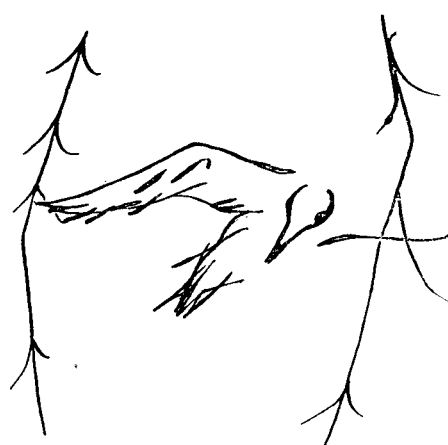
When next the soldier raised himself the raven had come.

He saw, circling lazily above him, a bird, a raven perhaps. The boy would certainly shoot it down. But no shot followed. Was the raven perhaps too high? And yet he had brought down higher and swifter birds than that. Finally, he fired: now it would drop. No. Unperturbed, it continued to soar in the sky, slowly, round and round. A pine cone toppled from a near-by tree. Had he taken to shooting at pine cones? One by one, as he hit them, the cones fell, striking with a dry crunch. At each report the soldier glanced up at the raven: was it falling? Not yet. Lower and lower, the black bird continued to circle overhead. Could it be, really, that the boy didn't see it? Or perhaps the raven didn't exist at all, was only a hallucination. But perhaps—perhaps a man near death sees all the birds fly over...and when he sees the raven it means that the hour has come. In any case, he must tell the boy, who went on shooting at mere pine cones.

The soldier rose to his feet and pointed up at the black bird:

—There's the raven! he shouted in his own language. The bullet struck him through the heart of the spread eagle embroidered on his jacket.

The raven came down slowly, wheeling.



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# THE PENALTY

Supine in silence, circled by his breath,
he sleeps with her whose unlatched womb
becomes a bolted room—
bolted against the wind and rain, against
the marble distances that keep
awake above his sleep.

There's not a word she says
but is made flesh.
Nature holds earth.
Asleep he lies in birth—
forgetting, as the earth forgets,
his monster seas and plunging fishernets.

She who betrays him; quoting in her sleep
a password's riddle, parting like a door
their bodies closed upon a lidless eye,
shall less than he
be rooted as a tree;
shall less than he
flow like a wave through mountain, meadow, hill:

As once she sprouted leaves, became
the Lady of the Lake;
so now, her hair
undone to nets of air,
her eyes congealed,
she walks awake in that uprooted field:

beyond his woven Springs,
and bottled harvestings.

—Helen Neville

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Atto secondo

Scena prima

Pomeriggio

Camera da letto della duchessa Gorina .

Giustina, Sebastiano

Una camera grande , con un letto a baldacchino e colonne dorate , sormontato da un grande stemma spagnolesco . Mobili barocchi . Molto disordine, panni in terra , [illegible] toletta [illegible] in tumulto , letto disfatto .

[illegible]

Nel momento in cui si alza il sipario , la cameriera Giustina sta riordinando rapidamente la stanza .Pur lavorando , Giustina canta sottovoce una filastrocca.

Giustina : E ti vuol dare un giovan della banda ;e non lo voglio no .
Che tutto il dì mi farà suonar la tromba ;e non lo voglio no.
E ti vuol dare un giovan caffettiere ; e non lo voglio no.
Che tutto il dì mi farà sciacquar le tazze;e non lo voglio no.
E ti vuol dare un giovan cavaliere ; e lo voglio sì.
Che tutto il dì mi porterà a spasso;e lo voglio sì ....

In quel momento si sente bussare alla porta .

Giustina : Avanti.

Sebastiano:( travestito da cameriere) con i pantaloni [illegible] giubba bianca)
Si può ? sono venuto a prendere il vassoio.

Giustina :( continuando a cantarellare e guardando con intenzione a Sebastiano)
Un giovan cavaliere ..e lo voglio sì ....Chi sei ? uno dei nuovi ?

Sebastiano : Sì , sono arrivato oggi .

Giustina : ( indicando un tavolo sul quale è posato il vassoio della colazione mattutina della duchessa ) Eccolo, il tuo vassoio . Io sono la cameriera personale della duchessa e mi chiamo Giustina . E tu come ti chiami ?

Sebastiano:( andando a prendere il vassoio ) Ricardo .

Giustina : ( lanciandogli uno sguardo assassino ) Sei un bel ragazzo , sta attento alla duchessa .

*The above extract is the first page of Act II of Moravia's La Mascherata ( The Fancy Dress Ball).*

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## THE ART OF FICTION VI

# ALBERTO MORAVIA

Via dell'Oca lies just off piazza del Popolo. A curiously shaped street, it opens out midway to form a *largo*, tapering at either end, in its brief, cobbled passage from the Lungotevere to a side of Santa Maria dei Miracoli. Its name, Street of the Goose, derives, like many streets in Rome, from the signboard of an eating house long forgotten.

On one side, extending unbroken from the Tiberside to via Ripetta, sprawl the houses of working-class people: a line of narrow doorways with dark, dank little stairs, cramped windows, a string of tiny shops; the smells of candied fruit, repair shops, wines of the Castelli, engine exhaust; the cry of street urchins, the test-roar of a Guzzi, a caterwaul from a court.

On the opposite side the buildings are taller, vaguely out of place, informed with the serene imperiousness of unchipped

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cornices and balconies overspilling with potted vines, tended creepers: homes of the well-to-do. It is here, on this side, that Alberto Moravia lives, in the only modern structure in the neighborhood, the building jutting like a jade and ivory dike into the surrounding Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century red gold.

The door is opened by the maid, a dark girl wearing the conventional black dress and white apron. Moravia is behind her in the entry, checking the arrival of a case of wine. He turns. The interviewers may go into the parlor. He'll be in directly.

Moravia's living room, at first sight, is disappointing. It has the elegant, formal anonymity of a Parioli apartment rented by a film actor, but smaller; or that of a reception room at the Swiss Legation, without the travel folders—or reading matter of any sort. There is very little furniture, and this is Victorian. Four paintings adorn the walls: two Guttusos, a Martinelli, and over a wide blue sofa, a Toti Scialoja. At either end of the sofa, an armchair; bracketed between the chairs and sofa, a long low Venetian coffee table inlaid with antique designs of the constellations and signs of the zodiac. The powder blue and old rose of the table are repeated in the colors of the Persian rug beneath. A record cabinet stands against the opposite wall; it contains Bach, Scarlatti, Beethoven's *Ninth* and some early quartets, Stravinsky, Prokofieff, Monteverdi's *Orfeo*. The impersonality of the room seems almost calculated. The room seems cold. Only the view from the windows recalls the approaching spring; flowers blossom on roof-terraces, the city is warm, red in the westering sun. Near one window hangs a Morandi etching pendant to a Bartolini, separated by a sideboard. Suddenly Moravia enters. He is tall, elegant, severe; the geometry of his face, its reflections, are cold, almost metallic; his voice is low, also metallic—one thinks, in each case, of gun metal. One detects a trace of unease, shyness perhaps, in his manner, but he is at home in his parlor; he settles comfortably on the sofa and crosses his legs.

INTERVIEWERS

May we start at the beginning?

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MORAVIA

At the beginning?

INTERVIEWERS

You were born...

MORAVIA

Oh. I was born here. I was born in Rome on the twenty-eighth of November, 1907.

INTERVIEWERS

And your education?

MORAVIA

My education, my formal education that is, is practically nil. I've got a grammar school diploma. No more. Just nine years of schooling. I had to drop out because of ossi-tuberculosis. I spent, altogether, five years in bed with it, between the ages of nine and seventeen. Till 1924.

INTERVIEWERS

Then "*Inverno di malato*" must refer to those years. One understands how—

MORAVIA

You aren't suggesting that I'm Girolamo, are you?

INTERVIEWERS

Well, yes...

MORAVIA

I'm not. Let me say—

INTERVIEWERS

(*Cautiously.*) It's the same disease.

MORAVIA

Let me say here and now that I do not appear in any of my works...

INTERVIEWERS

Maybe we can return to this a little later.

MORAVIA

Yes. But I want it quite clearly understood: my works

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are not autobiographical in the usual meaning of the word. Perhaps I can put it this way: whatever is autobiographical is so in only a very indirect manner, in a very general way. I am related to Girolamo, but I am not Girolamo. I do not take, and have never taken, either action or characters directly from life. Events may suggest events to be used in a work later; similarly, persons may suggest future characters; but *suggest* is the word to remember.

INTERVIEWERS

Fine. In any case, your first work was *Gli indifferenti* [*The Time of Indifference*]....

MORAVIA

Yes.

INTERVIEWERS

Will you tell us something about it?

MORAVIA

What do you want to know? I started it in October, 1925. I wrote a good deal of it in bed—at Cortona, at Morra's (1), incidentally. It was published in '29.

INTERVIEWERS

Was there much opposition to it? From the critics, that is? Or, even, from the reading public?

MORAVIA

(*Taking the defensive.*) Opposition? What kind of opposition?

INTERVIEWERS

I mean, coming after D'Annunzio, at the height of Fragmentism and *prosa d'arte*...

MORAVIA

Oh... No, there was no opposition to it at all. It was a great success. In fact, it was one of the greatest successes in all modern Italian literature. The greatest, actually; and I

(1) Count Umberto Morra di Lavriano, literary critic, historian, translator, responsible for the introduction of Virginia Woolf's writings to Italy; now director of the Società Italiana per l'Organizzazione Internazionale.

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can say this with all modesty. There had never been anything like it. Certainly no book in the last fifty years has been greeted with such unanimous enthusiasm and excitement.

INTERVIEWERS

And you were quite young at the time.

MORAVIA

Twenty-one. There were articles in the papers, some of them running to five full columns. It was without precedent, the book's success. (*Pausing.*) I may add that nothing approaching it has happened to me since—or, for that matter, to anyone else.

INTERVIEWERS

*Gli indifferenti* has been interpreted as a rather sharp, even bitter, efficient criticism of the Roman bourgeoisie, and of bourgeois values in general. Was it written in reaction against the society you saw about you?

MORAVIA

No. Not consciously, at least. (*Reconsidering; presently, with finality.*) It was not a reaction against anything. It was a novel.

INTERVIEWERS

Those critics who have cast you along with Svevo are wrong, then, you would say?

MORAVIA

Quite. Yes, quite. To tell the truth, Svevo is a writer I don't know at all well. I read him, and then only *Senilità*, and what's the other one?—*La coscienza di Zeno*—after I had written *Gli indifferenti*. There's no question of influence, certainly. Furthermore, Svevo was a conscious critic of the bourgeoisie; my own criticism, whatever there is, is unintentional, occurring entirely by chance. In my view, the function of a writer is not to criticize anyway; only to create living characters. Just that.

INTERVIEWERS

You write then ?

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MORAVIA

I write simply to amuse myself; I write to entertain others and... and, well, to express myself. I write to express myself. One has one's own way of expressing oneself and writing happens to be mine.

INTERVIEWERS

By that, you do not consider yourself a moralist, do you?

MORAVIA

No, I most emphatically do not! Truth and beauty are educatory in themselves. As regards social criticism I can give you a very topical example of what it amounts to. Take the Montesi-Montagna case (1). The left-wing press is using the trial as a club to belabor the government, the decadent aristocracy, and nearly everything else it's opposed to; it is, however, utterly incapable of reasoned objectivity, of avoiding partisanship. The very fact of representing the left wing, or a "wing" of any sort, implies a partisan position and non-objectivity. For that reason, it is impotent to criticize in a valid sense. Social criticism must necessarily, and always, be an extremely superficial thing. But don't misunderstand me. Writers, like all artists, are concerned to represent reality, to create a more absolute and complete reality than reality itself. They must, if they are to accomplish this, assume a moral position, a clearly conceived political, social, and philosophical attitude; in consequence, their beliefs are, of course, going to find their way into their work. What artists believe, however, is of secondary importance, ancillary to the work itself. A writer survives *despite* his beliefs. Lawrence will be read whatever one thinks of his notions on sex. Dante is read in the Soviet Union.

(1) Moravia here refers to the trial of Silvano Muto, editor of the monthly *Attualità*, who, at the time of this writing, having published the suggestion that Wilma Montesi, found dead on the Rome Lido, did not die of accidental drowning as determined by the police, was being tried for spreading "false and adulterated news designed to disturb public order." In the course of the trial a number of well-known personalities have been directly or indirectly implicated, from the dead Sicilian brigand, Giuliano, to the Pope's physician and a son of a former Prime Minister. Marquis Ugo Montagna di San Bartolomeo, with whom Wilma Montesi allegedly participated in narcotics orgies, has been accused of pandering, operating a narcotics ring, income-tax evasion, and other lesser offenses. A climax was reached the day before the Moravia interview when Tommaso Pavone, National Chief of Police, resigned under fire.

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A work of art, on the other hand, has a representative and expressive function. In this representation the author's ideas, his judgments, the author himself, are engaged with reality. Criticism, thus, is no more than a part, an aspect—a minor aspect—of the whole. I suppose, putting it this way, I am, after all, a moralist to some degree. We all are. You know, sometimes you wake up in the morning in revolt against everything. Nothing seems right. And for that day or so, at least until you get over it, you're a moralist. Put it this way: every man is a moralist in his own fashion, but he is many other things besides.

INTERVIEWERS

May we return to *Gli indifferenti* for just a moment? Up to writing it, what authors had influenced you most, would you say?

MORAVIA

It's difficult to say. Perhaps, as regards narrative technique, Dostoevsky and Joyce.

INTERVIEWERS

Joyce?

MORAVIA

Well, no—let me explain. Joyce only to the extent that I learned from him the use of the time element bound with action. From Dostoevsky I got an understanding of the intricacies of the dramatic novel.

INTERVIEWERS

And in writing *Gli indifferenti*, what problems in particular did you face?

MORAVIA

There was one big one in my attempt—borrowing a drama technique to begin and end the story within a brief, clearly delimited period, omitting nothing. All the action, in fact, takes place within two days. The *personae* dine, sleep, entertain themselves, betray one another; and that, succinctly, is all. And everything happens, as it were, "on stage."

INTERVIEWERS

Have you written for the stage itself?

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MORAVIA

A little. There's a stage reduction of *Gli indifferenti* which I made with Luigi Squarzina, and I've written one play myself, *La mascherata* [*The Fancy Dress Party*].

INTERVIEWERS

Based on the book?

MORAVIA

Not exactly. The idea's the same; much of the action has been changed, however. It's being put on later this month [March] in Milan by the Piccolo Teatro.

INTERVIEWERS

Do you intend to continue writing plays?

MORAVIA

Yes. Oh yes, I hope to go on. My interest in the theater dates back a good many years. Even as a youngster I read, and I continue to read and enjoy, plays—for the most part, the masters: Shakespeare, other of the Elizabethans, Molière, Goldoni, the Spanish theater, Lope de Vega, Calderòn. I'm drawn most, in my reading, to tragedy, which, in my opinion, is the greatest of all forms of artistic expression, the theater itself being the most complete of literary forms. Unfortunately, contemporary drama is non-existent...

INTERVIEWERS

How's that? You mean, perhaps, in Italy.

MORAVIA

No. Simply that there is no modern drama. Not that it's not being staged, but that none has been written.

INTERVIEWERS

But O'Neill, Shaw, Pirandello...

MORAVIA

No, none of them. Neither O'Neill, Shaw, Pirandello or anyone has created drama—tragedy—in the deepest meaning of the word. The basis of drama is language: poetic language. Even Ibsen, the greatest of modern dramatists,

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resorted to every-day language and, in consequence, by my definition failed to create true drama.

INTERVIEWERS

Christopher Fry writes poetic dramas. You may have seen *The Lady's Not For Burning* last year at the Eliseo.

MORAVIA

No.

INTERVIEWERS

You might approve of him.

MORAVIA

I might. I'd have to see first.

INTERVIEWERS

And your film work?

MORAVIA

Script-writing, you mean? I haven't actually done much, and that little I've done I haven't particularly enjoyed.

INTERVIEWERS

Yet it is another art form.

MORAVIA

Of course it is. Certainly. Wherever there is craftsmanship there is art. But the question is this: up to what *point will the motion picture permit full expression*? The camera is a less complete instrument of expression than the pen, even in the hands of an Eisenstein. It will never be able to express all, say, that Proust was capable of. Never. For all that, it is a spectacular ambience, overflowing with life, so that the work is not entirely a grind. It's the only really alive art-ambience in Italy today, due to its great financial backing. But to work for motion pictures is exhausting. And a writer is never able to be more than an "idea-man" or a scenarist. An underling, in effect. It offers him little satisfaction apart from the pay. His name doesn't even appear on the posters. For a writer it's a bitter work. What's more, the films are an impure art, at the mercy of a welter of mechanisms—*gadgets* I think you say in English—



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*ficelles*. It has little spontaneity. This is only natural, of course, when you consider the hundreds of mechanical devices that are used in making a film, the army of technicians. The whole process is a cut and dried affair. One's inspiration grows stale working in motion pictures; and worse, one's mind grows accustomed to forever looking for gimmicks and by so doing is eventually ruined, shot. I don't like film work in the least. You understand what I mean: its compensations are not, in a real sense, worth while; hardly worth the money unless you need it.

INTERVIEWERS

Just now you're working on *La romana* [*The Woman of Rome*], aren't you?

MORAVIA

Yes, but I'd rather that we didn't discuss it. We've run into a few difficulties, and well...

INTERVIEWERS

You wouldn't want to say *any*thing?

MORAVIA

Not for publication. But if you'll put your pens down...

***

INTERVIEWERS

Will you tell us about the book?

MORAVIA

This is interesting, too. *La romana* started out as a short story for the third page (1). I began it on November 1st, 1945. I had intended it to run to no more than three or four typescript pages, treating the relations between a woman and her daughter. But I simply went on writing. Four months later, by March 1st, the first draft was finished.

INTERVIEWERS

It was not a case of the tail running away with the dog?

(1) In Italian newspapers, the third page is devoted to fiction and articles of general cultural interest, in the leading papers by the country's first writers.

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MORAVIA

It was a case, simply, of my thinking initially that I had a short story and finding four months later that it was a novel instead.

INTERVIEWERS

Have there been times when characters have got out of hand?

MORAVIA

Not in anything I've published. Whenever characters get out of control it's a sign that the work has not arisen from genuine inspiration. One doesn't go on then .

INTERVIEWERS

Did you work from notes on *La romana*? Rumor has it—

MORAVIA

Never. I never work from notes. I have never taken notes nor ever even possessed a notebook. My work, in fact, is not prepared beforehand in any way. I might add, too, that when I'm not working I don't think of my work at all. When I sit down to write—that's between nine and noon every morning, and I have never, incidentally, written a line in the afternoon or at night—when I sit at my table to write, I never know what it's going to be till I'm under way. I trust in inspiration, which sometimes comes and sometimes doesn't. But I don't sit back waiting for it. I work *every* day.

INTERVIEWERS

I suppose you were helped some by your wife. The psychology....

MORAVIA

Not at all. For the psychology of my characters, and for every other aspect of my work, I draw solely upon my experience; but understand, never in a documentary, a textbook, sense...

I've got a splitting headache. (*Pressing his temples between his thumb and fingers, and closing his eyes.*)

INTERVIEWERS

A cold perhaps?...

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MORAVIA

No, I think maybe it was the drinking last night. Will you have something to drink, by the way? Whisky? Cognac?

INTERVIEWERS

Cognac.

(*Moravia rises and crosses to the far end of the room to the sideboard between the two etchings; interrupted for a moment by a call to the telephone he returns presently, followed by one of his wife's Siamese kittens, with an unopened bottle of Courvoisier and three glasses tall and slender as flageolets. He explains their curious shape: they were used in former times as champagne glasses.*)

INTERVIEWERS

How do you explain the fact that your most sympathetic characters are almost invariably women? *La romana, la provinciale, la messicana...* innumerable women.

MORAVIA

But that's not a fact. Quite often some of my most sympathetic characters have been men, or boys like Michele in *Gli indifferenti*, Agostino in *Agostino*, Luca in *La disubbidienza*. I'd say, in fact, that most of my protagonists are sympathetic.

INTERVIEWERS

Marcello Clerici, too? [*The Conformist.*]

MORAVIA

Yes, Clerici too, in a sense. Didn't you think he was?

INTERVIEWERS

Anything but. More like Pratolini's *eroe del nostro tempo*. You don't mean that you actually felt some affection for him?

MORAVIA

Affection, no. More, pity. He was a pitiable character. Pitiable because a victim of circumstance, led astray by the times, a *traviato*. But certainly he was not negative. And here we're closer to the point. I have no negative characters. I don't think it's possible to write a good novel around a negative personality.

For some of my characters I have felt affection, though.

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INTERVIEWERS

For Adriana.

MORAVIA

For Adriana, yes. Certainly for Adriana.

INTERVIEWERS

Working without notes, without a plan or outline or anything, you must make quite a few revisions.

MORAVIA

Oh yes, that I *do* do. Each book is worked over several times. I like to compare my method with that of painters centuries ago, proceeding, as it were, from layer to layer. The first draft is quite crude, far from being perfect, by no means finished; although even then, even at that point, it has its final structure, the form is visible. After that I rewrite it as many times—apply as many "layers"—as I feel to be necessary.

INTERVIEWERS

Which is how many as a rule?

MORAVIA

Well, *La romana* was written twice. Then I went over it a third time, very carefully, minutely, until I had it the way I wanted it, till I was satisfied.

INTERVIEWERS

Two drafts then, and a final, detailed correction of the second manuscript, is that it?

MORAVIA

Yes.

INTERVIEWERS

And that's usually the case, two drafts—?

MORAVIA

Yes. (*Thinking for a moment.*) It was three times with *Il conformista*, too.

INTERVIEWERS

Would you say that your realism stems from the French?

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MORAVIA

No. No, I wouldn't say so. If there is such a derivation, I'm not at all conscious of it. I consider my literary antecedents to be Manzoni, Dostoevsky, Joyce. Of the French, I like, primarily, the Eighteenth Century, Voltaire, Diderot; then, Stendhal, Balzac, Maupassant.

INTERVIEWERS

Flaubert?

MORAVIA

Not particularly.

INTERVIEWERS

Zola?

MORAVIA

*Not at all!...* I've got a splitting headache. I'm sorry. (*Draining his glass.*) Here, have some more. Will you take some coffee?... Where was I?

INTERVIEWERS

You don't like Zola.

MORAVIA

Oh, yes. I was saying my literary education has been, for the most part, classsical. Classical prose and classical drama. The realists and naturalists, to be perfectly frank, don't interest me very much.

INTERVIEWERS

They do interest, apparently, and have had a considerable influence upon the young writers who have appeared since the War. Especially the Americans seem to have been an influence, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Dos Passos...

MORAVIA

Yes, that's quite so from what I know of post-War Italian writing. But the influence has been indirect: distilled through Vittorini. Vittorini has been the greatest of all influences upon the younger generation of Italian writers. The influence is American just the same, as you suggest; but Vittorini-ized American. I was once judge in a competition held by *L'Unità* to award prizes for fiction. Out of fifty manuscripts submitted, a good half of them were by young writers influenced by Vittorini. Vittorini and the sort of

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"poetic" prose you can find in Hemingway in places, and in Faulkner.

INTERVIEWERS

Still, editing *Nuovi Argomenti* you must see a great deal of new writing.

MORAVIA

How I wish I did! Italian writers are lazy. All in all, I receive very little. Take our symposium on Communist art. We were promised twenty-five major contributions. And how many did we get? Just imagine—three. It's really a task running a review in Italy. What we need, and don't get, are literary and political essays of length, twenty to thirty pages. We get lots of little four- and five-page squibs; only that's not what we're looking for.

INTERVIEWERS

But I meant fiction. Editing *Nuovi Argomenti* you must know more about modern Italian fiction than you admit.

MORAVIA

No; quite truthfully, I know only those writers everybody knows. Besides, you don't have to read everything to know what you like. I'd rather not name any names; there would be terrible gaps and *gaffes*.

INTERVIEWERS

Will you tell us now something about your *Racconti romani*?

MORAVIA

There's not much I can say about them. They describe the Roman lower classes and petite bourgeoisie in a particular period after the War.

INTERVIEWERS

Is that all? I mean, there's nothing you can add to that?

MORAVIA

What *can* I add? Well, no, really... really there's quite a bit I can say. There's always a lot I can say about my last publication. Ask me questions and I'll try to answer whatever you ask.

INTERVIEWERS

To be truthful, I've read only one of them. I don't usually

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see the *Corriere della Sera*, and the book itself is rather expensive...

MORAVIA

(*Smiling.*) Twenty-four hundred.

INTERVIEWERS

In any case, you have not heretofore, or at least not often, dealt with the lower classes and petite bourgeoisie. These stories are a clear departure from your previous work. Perhaps you might say something about any problems in particular that you faced in writing them.

MORAVIA

Each of my books is the result, if not of pre-design, of highly involved thought. In writing the *Racconti romani* there *were* specific problems I had to cope with. Problems of language. Let me begin this way: up to *I racconti romani* all of my works had been written in the third person, even when, as in *La romana* and since—in the novel I have just finished—told in the first person. By third person I mean simply expressing oneself in a sustained literary style, the style of the author. I've explained this, by the way, in a note to the Penguin edition of *The Woman of Rome*. In the *Racconti romani*, on the other hand, I adopted for the first time the language of the character, the language of the first person; but then again, not the language precisely, rather the *tone* of the language. There were advantages and disadvantages in taking this tack. Advantages for the reader in that he was afforded greater intimacy, he entered directly into the heart of things; he was not standing outside peeping in. The method was essentially photographic. The great disadvantage of the first person consists of the tremendous limitations imposed upon what the author can say. I could deal only with what the subject himself might deal with, speak only of what the subject might speak of. It was even further restricted by the fact that, say, a taxi driver could not speak with any real knowledge even of a washerwoman's work, whereas in the third person I might permit myself to speak of whatever I wished. Adriana, the Woman of Rome, speaking in my third-first person could speak of anything in Rome that I myself, also a Roman, could speak of.

The use of the first person mode in treating the Roman lower

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classes implies, of course, the use of dialect. And the use of dialect imposes stringent limitations upon one's material. You cannot say in dialect all that you may say in the language itself. Even Belli, the master of *romanesco*, could speak of certain things, but was prevented from speaking of others. The working classes are narrowly restricted in their choice of expression, and personally I am not particularly predisposed to dialect literature. Dialect is an inferior form of expression because it is a less cultivated form. It does have its fascinating aspects, however; but it remains cruder, more imperfect, than the language itself. In dialect one expresses chiefly, and quite well, primal urges and exigent necessities—eating, sleeping, drinking, making love, and so forth.

In the *Racconti romani*—there are sixty-one in the volume, though I've written about eighty of them now—the spoken language is Italian, but the construction of the language is irregular, and there is here and there an occasional word in dialect to capture a particular vernacular nuance, the flavor and raciness of *romanesco*.

I've tried in these stories, as I have said, to depict the life of the sub-proletariat and the très petite bourgeoisie in a period just after the last war with the black market and all the rest. The genre is picaresque. The *picaro* is a character who lives exclusively as an economic being, the Marxist archetype, in that his first concern is his belly: eating. There is no love, genuine romantic love; rather, and above all, the one compelling fact that he must eat or perish. For this reason, the *picaro* is also an arid being. His life is one of trickery, deception, dishonesty if you will. The life of feelings, and with it the language of sensibility, begins on a rather more elevated level.

INTERVIEWERS

We're intrigued by a remark you made a few moments ago about a novel you've just finished.

MORAVIA

Yes, *Il disprezzo*. I've just got it off to the publishers. It'll be out in the autumn, I think. In English it's to be called *A Ghost at Noon*. It's set in Rome and Capri, in film circles. The narrator is a scenarist. And it's concerned again with married relations; some of the same themes of *Amore conjugale* [*Conjugal Love*] recur in it.

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INTERVIEWERS

Themes have a way of recurring throughout your work.

MORAVIA

Of course. Naturally. In the works of every writer with any body of work to show for his effort, you will find recurrent themes. I view the novel, a single novel as well as a writer's entire corpus, as a musical composition in which the characters are themes, from variation to variation completing an entire parabola; similarly for the themes themselves. This simile of a musical composition comes to mind, I think, because of my approach to my material; it is never calculated and pre-designed, rather, instinctive: worked out by ear, as it were.

INTERVIEWERS

One last book now. We can't discuss them all. But will you tell us something about *La mascherata*? That, and how it ever got by the censors.

MORAVIA

Ah, now that you mention it, that was one time when I *was* concerned to write social criticism. The only time, however. In 1936, I went to Mexico, and the Hispano-American scene suggested to me the idea for a satire. I returned and for several years toyed with the idea. Then, in 1940, I went to Capri and wrote it. What happened afterward—you ask about the censors—is an amusing story. At least it seems amusing now. It was 1940. We were in the full flood of war, Fascism, censorship, etcetera, etcetera. The manuscript, once ready, like all manuscripts, had to be submitted to the Ministry of Popular Culture for approval. This Ministry, let me explain, was overrun by grammar school teachers who received three hundred lire, about six or seven thousand now, for each book they read. And, of course, to preserve their sinecures, whenever possible they turned in negative judgments. Well, I submitted the manuscript. But whoever read it, not wishing to take any position on the book, passed it to the Under Secretary; the Under Secretary, with similar qualms, passed it to the Secretary; the Secretary to the Minister; and the Minister, finally—to Mussolini.

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INTERVIEWERS

I suppose, then, you were called on the carpet?

MORAVIA

Not at all. Mussolini ordered the book to be published.

INTERVIEWERS

Oh!

MORAVIA

He was not a bad man.

INTERVIEWERS

This interview, you realize, is being published abroad. Abroad, Mussolini is seen in quite a different light.

MORAVIA

(*Turning to Signorina de Dominicis.*) But *we* understand what Mussolini was. I hope that doesn't make us Fascists! His worst fault was his abysmal ignorance of foreign affairs. If he had had a foreign policy as clever as his domestic one maybe he'd be Duce today. Mussolini ordered the book to be published. And it was. A month later, however, I received an unsigned communication notifying me that the book was being withdrawn. And that was that. The book didn't appear again till after the Liberation.

INTERVIEWERS

Was that your only tilt with the censors?

MORAVIA

Oh no; not by any means! I've been a life-long anti-Fascist. There was a running battle between me and the Fascist authorities beginning in '29 and ending with the German occupation in 1943 when I had to go into hiding in the mountains, near the southern front, where I waited nine months until the Allies arrived. Time and again my books were not allowed to be mentioned in the press. Many times by order of the Ministry of Culture I lost jobs I held on newspapers, and for some years I was forced to write under the pen name of Pseudo.

Censorship is an awful thing! (*Leaning forward to push*

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*back his cognac glass and vigorously stroking the glass top of the coffee table with his forefinger.*) And a damned hardy plant once it takes root. The Ministry of Culture was the last to close up shop. I sent *Agostino* to them two months before the fall of Fascism. Two months before the end. While all about them everything was toppling, falling to ruin, the Ministry of Popular Culture was doing business as usual. Approval looked not to be forthcoming; so one day I went up there, to via Veneto—you know the place; they're still there, incidentally: I know them all—to see what the trouble was. They told me that they were afraid that they wouldn't be able to give approval to the book. My dossier was lying open on the desk, and when the secretary left the room for a moment I glanced at it. There was a letter from the Brazilian cultural attaché in it, some poet, informing the Minister that in Brazil I was considered a subversive. In Brazil of all places! But that letter, that alone, was enough to prevent the book's publication. Another time—it was for *Le ambizioni sbagliate* [*The Wheel of Fortune*]—when I went up, I found the manuscript scattered all over the place, in several different offices, with a number of different people reading *parts* of it! Censorship is monstrous, a monstrous thing! I can tell you all you want to know about it.

They started out, however, rather liberal. With time they grew worse. Besides filling the Ministry up with timid grammar school teachers, the censors were also either bureaucrats or writers *manqués*; and heaven help you if your book fell into the hands of one of those "writers"!

INTERVIEWERS

And how is it for the writer today? You said the censors were "still there."

MORAVIA

The writer has nothing to fear. He can publish whatever he wishes. It's those in the cinema, and in the theater, who have it bad.

INTERVIEWERS

What about the *Index*?

MORAVIA

The *Index* isn't really censorship, at least not in Italy. The Vatican is one thing and Italy is another, two separate

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and distinct states. If it were to come to power in Italy, or if it were to gain the power that it has in Ireland or Spain, *then* it would be very serious.

INTERVIEWERS

One would have thought, however, by your protest when you were placed on the *Index* that you regarded it as an abridgment of your freedom as a writer.

MORAVIA

No, it wasn't that. I was certainly upset, but mostly because I disliked the scandal.

INTERVIEWERS

Anyway, it must have increased your sales. I remember it was about then that Bompiani started bringing out your collected works in de luxe editions.

MORAVIA

No, in Italy the *Index* doesn't affect one's sales one way or the other. I've always sold well, and there was no appreciable rise in sales after the *Index* affair.

INTERVIEWERS

You do not see the likelihood of Italy falling to a new totalitarian regime?

MORAVIA

There's the likelihood, but a quite remote one. If we were to come under a new totalitarianism, writers, I now believe, would have no decent recourse but to give up writing altogether.

INTERVIEWERS

You do not foresee a time, then, when you will occupy your mornings otherwise.

MORAVIA

I do not foresee a time when I shall feel that I have nothing to say.

—Anna Maria de Dominicis
Ben Johnson

*(The Moravia interview is the sixth in a series on the Art of Fiction. Authors interviewed have included E. M. Forster, François Mauriac, Graham Greene, Irwin Shaw, and William Styron. Future interviews will be held with Joyce Cary, André Malraux, Ernest Hemingway and Truman Capote.)*

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JAMES BROUGHTON

## THE DRY-DOCK STRIPLING

What are you cutting down, my boy?
What are you erasing?
Off the bilgey bottom, off the petrifying weighs
I am chopping the old ballast that has leaned on my eyes,
and now I know a topmast is where I'll look to sea.

What are you cutting up, my son?
What are you replacing?
My rages will not stutter now behind the grimy burners
where my shovel-thumbs blistered soothing an old furnace,
for off slid the anchor when I launched my own free.

What are you cutting loose, my man?
What are you disgracing?
No sticker-in-the-mud will longer barnacle my travel.
Now off is rubbed the rust and the glue from my keel
and scrubbed swim the mermaids round my brand new me.

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## TRISTAN AT THE SEASHORE

Apathy and delirium sun themselves on the porch.
All the old dragons loll along the beach.
Such lightning has rather a hazy lurch.

The rabbits are very pink around here, said Tristan.
What twitters the duckling dreams?

Catamount jars wilt away in the sand
for the scalawag sock-maker has long since skipped.
Monkeyshine and mollycoddle walk hand in hand
buying mouse miracles in every shop.

Sloth and wheedling play ball in the hammock.
All the cold boas curl around the deck.
Not much wind for propping up a rope trick.

These glassblowers have very thin bottlenecks, said Tristan.
What withers all goldfish schemes?

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The small, exquisite *atelier* in which Zao-Wou-Ki lives and works gives on a luminous garden with a weathered stake fence. On summer afternoons, sitting there in the radiant green light, one recalls the ancient chronicles of Li-Koueitcheng's workshop, where emperors were wont to take their ease while the Master spun magic worlds from his brush. The spell is heightened as Madame Zao, supple and lovely as a dancer, moves with a shy smile among the shadows. But Zao-Wou-Ki is no bearded sage of legends; he is a modest aimiable young man, vital, and sensitive to the currents of his time. Despite the aqueous quiet of his art, he is impatient for the sun and the frequent games of tennis to which he is devoted.

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Born in Pekin in 1920, and educated there, Zao early revealed the gifts which were to win him the distinction of being the youngest artist to hold the coveted post of Professor at the famous university. But his interests were not to rest with Chinese art alone. More and more, Western painting, particularly that of Klee (himself profoundly influenced by the Chinese), compelled his attention, and, inevitably, he made Paris his home after World War II. The Paris art world was quick to discover his talents, and, logically enough, the gallery with which he is affiliated is that of Pierre Loeb, Klee's discoverer.

Zao-Wou-Ki's art is a sensitive fusion of elements of that to which he was born—the Chinese—and that which is his by adoption—the European—and, although increasingly abstract, it is composed mainly from the most delicate figurations in nature. His brush, perpetually moving, has discovered the play of light upon hillsides and gentle streams, the drift of kelp beneath the surface of a pool, the dart of fish in morning rivers, the plumes of trees or a flight of geese on the horizon. In this respect, the painting of Zao-Wou-Ki represents not merely two traditions, but art wherever it exists in the world.



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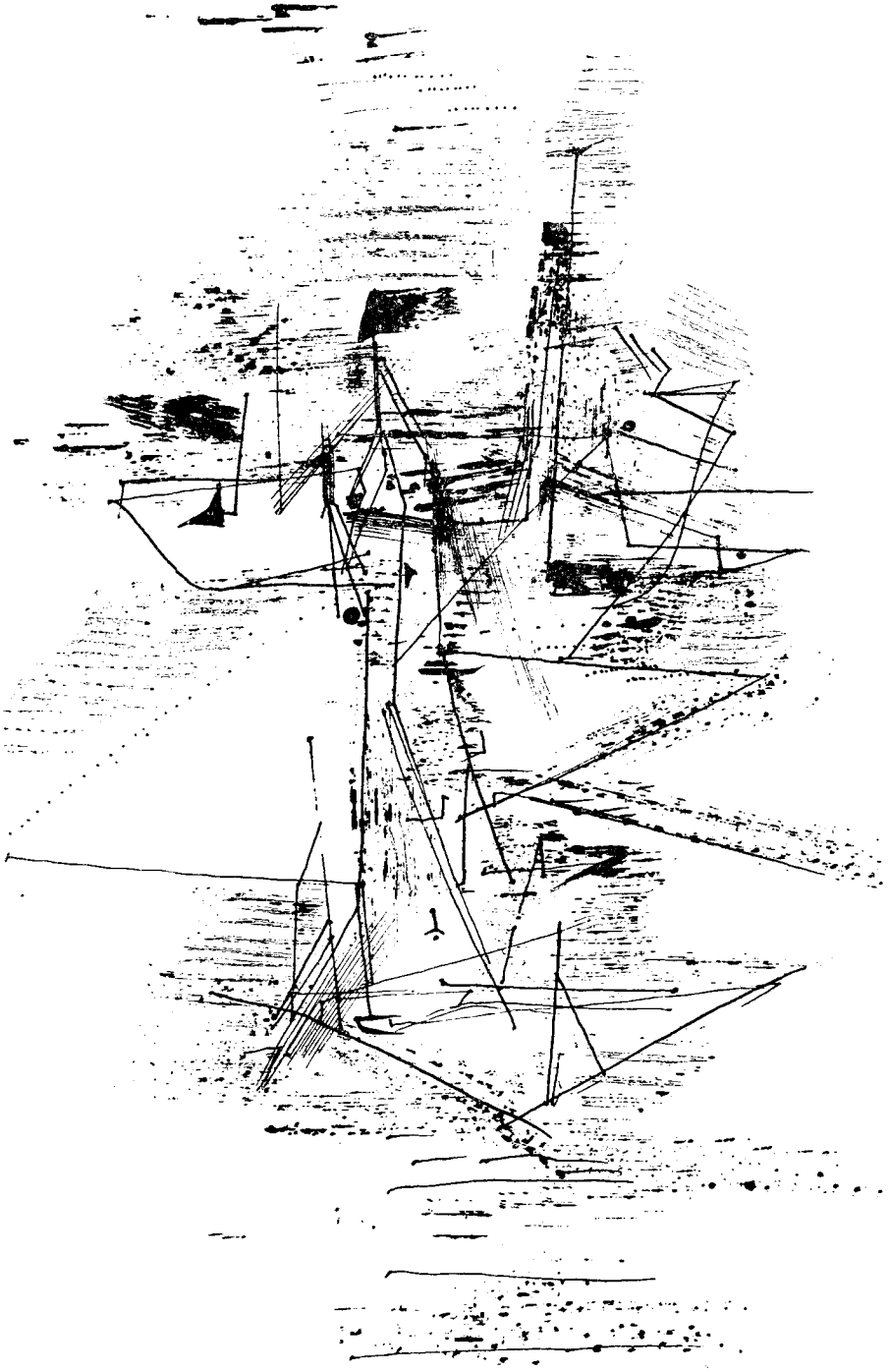

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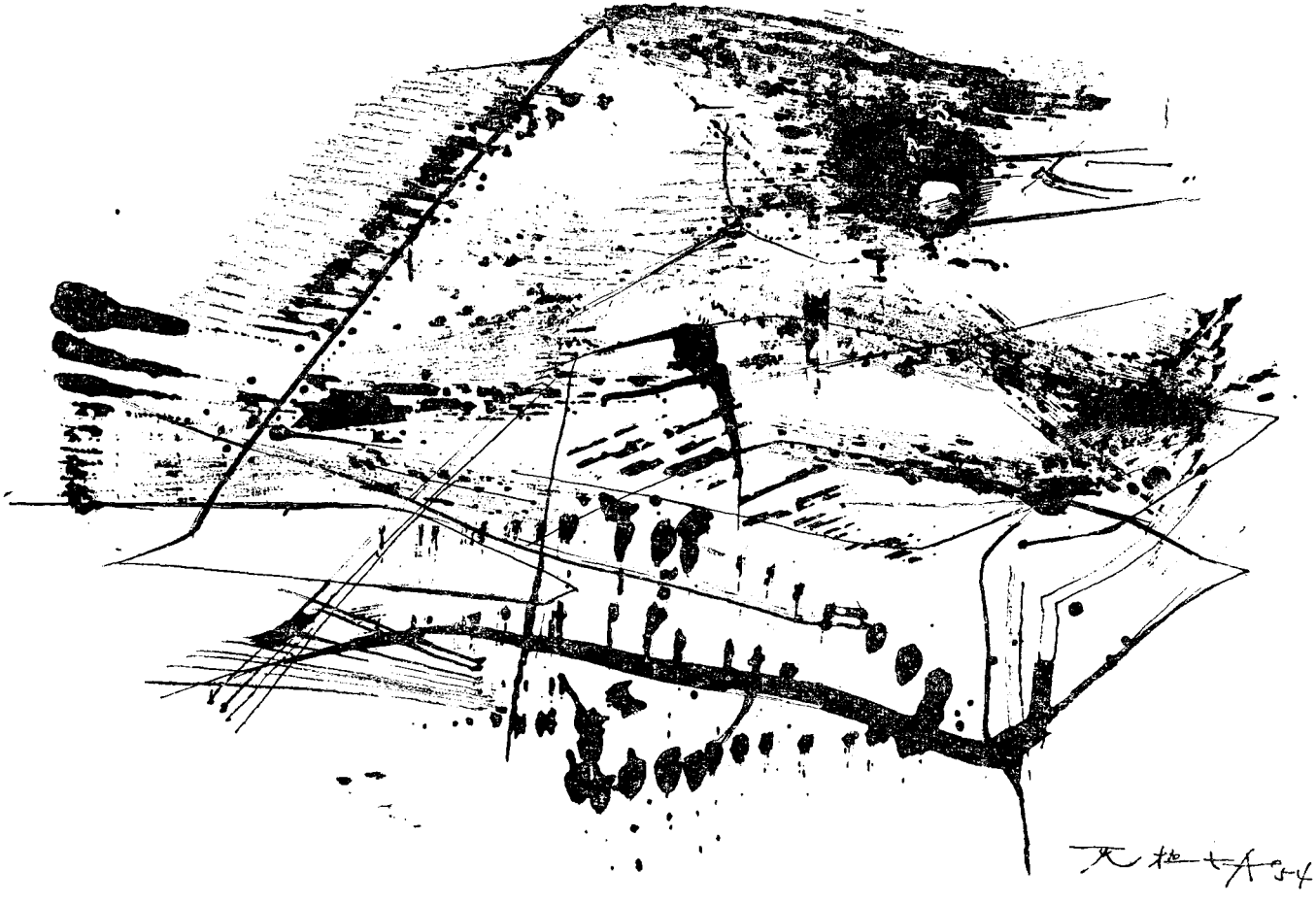

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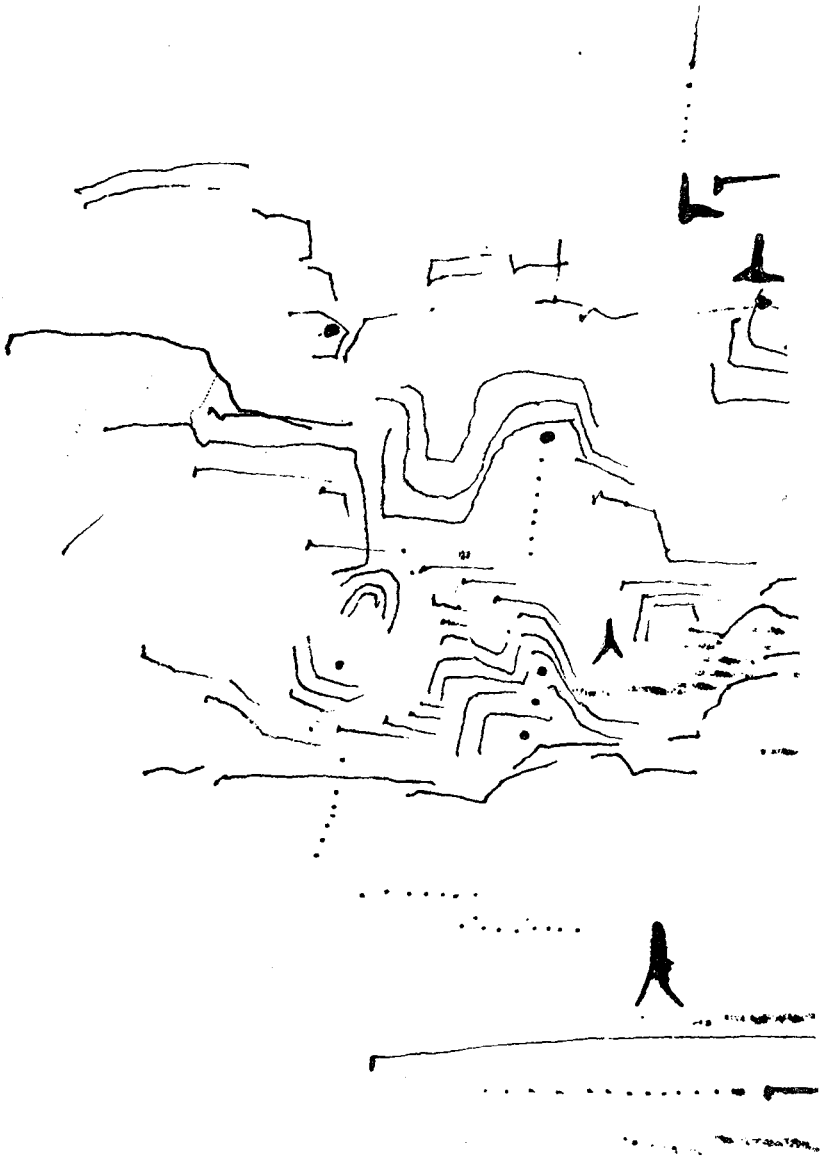

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## ARS POETICA

Jerome discovered fifteen signs of doom
each of a day; seas will explode in steam,
man's towers burst into ash, the earth will move,

yawn forth the whitened dead, the living reave,
burning as suns, to judgment. Joel wrote
of the day's darkening to soundless heat,

the moon gouted with blood, that we be told
we grow too little and we live too late.
Now, in the coming winter years, the coast

crumbling to pull of tide, the first snow paled,
tenuous, on the high peaks, I feel the vast
and casual enormity, the haste

of individual doom here at my hand.
We see no tokening, yet in the west
the sun, in motionless potential act,

is turned from seeing; even with this end
each one of us, in the delay of light,
becomes arrested action. We forget

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through keeping motion, but the falling child
at once is caught forever in mid-fault:
the light recedes, implicit and precise.

Knowing the single name my end is called
and that its signs are with me, out of these
possible courses that may bring short pause

to my dissolving earth, the few discrete
conspiracies to halt the turning stars,
only the word is potent to redeem:

choose the intractable and gradual art.

—Barney Childs

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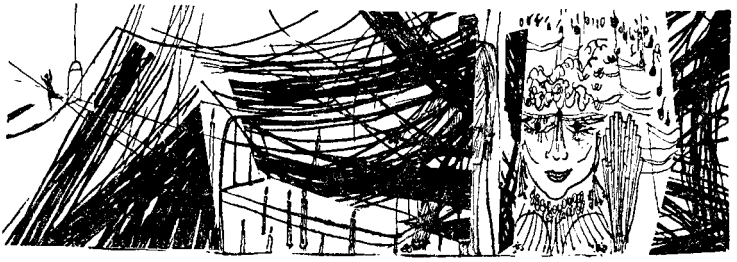
CLAUDE-ANTOINE CICCIONE
*Translated by Peter Matthiessen*



# ASSUNTA SPEAKS

*Assunta speaks*: One day my father threw me out of his house. And he threw me out even though, at that time, our family life had achieved a certain harmony; we had forsworn love of one another in favor of a new era of politeness and reserve. Each act became part of a ritual, each day a repetition of identical phrases and gestures. We had, besides, a special protocol for Sundays and holidays, and on my birthday, and at Easter and Christmas, my father would make me a little present of a bag of caramels and a small bouquet of violets. On these occasions, wordless, he would kiss me on the cheek, slightly above the bone due to his great height, and I would have been shocked had he kissed me anywhere but there.

My father adapted himself superbly to this sort of life, and with very good reason: he did not want my sister and me to marry. From the time of my holy communion he set up a vacuum around us, refusing to receive anybody or to go anywhere himself. He even avoided family gatherings, since my sisters had salvaged their husbands from just such occasions. Instead he affected an unwillingness to be disturbed in his habits (and his laziness). Yet he spoke to us often of the day when we would marry, and abandon him to old age and sickness and solitude, and thus he became immensely sorry for himself.

Such hypocrisy served only to clarify the truth: he at-

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tempted to render this future of ours as distant as dream in order to spare us our illusions, for we could live in the dream without believing it. Not that he left us much time for our imaginings, once he had satisfied himself with this method of frustrating us.

For Angela the question of marriage was academic, preoccupied as she was with work and gain. Or so I thought, for she surpassed us all in resignation and self-satisfaction (my own resignation was of the snarling variety, forever on the point of insurrection). It was impossible to annoy her or upset her in any way, impossible to make her smile. Yet a sort of permanent grin never left her expression which, without being rigid, was unchangeable, reflecting incredible calm and assurance, and because of this grin she was considered stupid. She was often discussed at the public laundry, where some said she was beautiful, others that she worked very hard (and in truth, I never saw her unoccupied; when she wasn't at the laundry, she managed to busy herself elsewhere, with darning, sewing, or knitting), but it was agreed that she lacked intelligence and liveliness, and would never find herself a husband.

My father got along with her splendidly. Often, for my benefit, he lauded her diligence and obedience, and never tired of complimenting her on her project of the moment. He escorted her to the movies. At eighteen, she was granted the privilege of smoking after meals. Needless to say, I had no right to such considerations, and if Angela enjoyed them it was only because she had never obstructed him as I had. For me, the loud voice and the blow sufficed, but Angela never gave him occasion to fly into a rage. Nor, during those last years in the house, did I. But he was perfectly aware that it was a simple matter of goading me a little, just a little, and enjoyed the sense of domination the knowledge afforded him.

I knew it, too. The realization was rampant in my thoughts, in company with a longing to know the other sex. In the street I would gaze into men's eyes to see if I unsettled them, and to unsettle myself as well. Back at the house, I would nurse the emotion as long as possible since it was the

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sole pleasure I knew. Clearly, delivering laundry or preparing a meal was no way to find the husband or lover who would free me from my father. Nor did I particularly want a husband, for married, I would remain poor and virtuous, and cede my father a permanent advantage. No, I wanted a lover to lie to, to torment and humiliate in my turn. But I believed this ambition impossible and despaired, as well, of a second obsession: I could not bear to be poor any longer, and I did not wish to marry a poor man, yet my solitary hope of marriage depended on pleasing such a man.

For example, when I delivered laundry to the wealthy houses, I dealt entirely with the servants, and never got further than the pantry. The bedrooms and *salons* might as well have been hundreds of kilometers from Rome, so remote were they from my experience. I knew only the dirty stairways of my building and our dreary little flat and the white, somber identical municipal offices. And when the ladies came to these pantries to inspect the delivery, complaining about this and that, they never addressed a word to me; a housekeeper in the role of interpreter parroted faithfully their words and my own. Once a young man came, seating himself on the corner of the table and joking with the cook, apparently an old retainer. He never stopped laughing. He was handsome and distinguished, and his movements were more youthful and gracious than I had believed possible in a man. And then his hair, which was sleek and pommaded, had a certain odor—rich and heavy, yet agreeable and very virile, and not in the least like the damp, filthy reek of the hair of a certain neighbor, which turned my stomach every time I went up the stairs behind him. In fact, this handsome black hair disturbed me very much, and as for his arms and hands, I could not take my eyes off them. When I left a moment later without saying goodbye, the cook, who had paid me no attention, went right on talking to him. They were laughing. He had not even looked at me, not even a glance of curiosity much less the look of a man in the presence of an unknown woman. He had not looked at me at all, and he left me speechless.

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Then Madame Papaphotides arrived. She took the apartment just above us, and in the process of her installation, revolutionized the house. She filled the stairwell with her odor of sweet-william, and instantly we knew she was unclean. There were also her cries and resounding exclamations; cursing and complaining simultaneously, she would vent a prolonged "La.. La.. La..", then a burst of ringing "Non!"s like submachinegun fire. Her oaths, as she herself seemed well aware, were shocking to my father, and when she slapped a neighbor's child on the landing, he deemed it intolerable that this person should strike another's infants. And finally, observing through his window the unloading of her furniture, a lacquer table, a dresser resplendent with sea shells, some red-and-yellow divans, a piano, a bidet, each item more soiled than the last, he proclaimed with vexation, "She's a woman of easy virtue!" So appalled was he in the days that followed by her insane red hair, her permanent green bathrobe of corded velvet, her black belt and her golden slippers, not to mention the rouge, lipstick, lacquered fingernails, and silver cream on the eyelids, that he forbade us to exchange a word with her—not that she ever gave us occasion.

Nevertheless she was to become my very best friend, and at a time when we had long since lost interest in her.

One Sunday afternoon I was ordered to stay in the apartment, the rest having gone for a walk. It was summer, and the heat was overpowering. Stretched out on my bed I became so restless that at last I went down into the street and moved around a little. When I climbed the stairs once more, I heard music behind her door, and I knocked. She let me in. Her head was high and her bearing was regal, and I had the instant impression that all her makeup was a calculated insult to the neighbors. She also had a pair of turtledoves on her shoulder. She offered me some inexcusable port which seemed to me exquisite at the time, and set about telling me the history of her life. I remember a certain gesture she had as she did so. She would hold her hand poised by her head, fingers pointed at her ear and

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widely separated, and she would plunge it into her coiffure at the end of every sentence. I noticed this because of the enormous diamonds on her rings, and this patent evidence of wealth suited her narrative perfectly.

She progressed very rapidly to her marriage in 1913 with a Greek sailor, a captain whose acquaintance she had made in Naples during a seance of spiritualism. She bared, in passing, a profound contempt for the charlatans who claimed to read in tea leaves and crystal balls, as well as for such fakers as astrologists and mental telegraphers. Fortune-teller and Palmist, she had learned her science from a gypsy lady whose formidable art had placed her in demand throughout the world. She had perished, indeed, in an earthquake in Japan.

At any rate, Madame Papaphotides, once married to her sailor, departed for Athens, where she consorted with the French and English aristocracy, and enjoyed in the bargain the friendship of an actress in the plays of Sophocles, then given at the antique theatre. During this period her husband, for whom the cards had foretold a violent end, was engaged in intensive espionnage in the Cyclades, and in effect was put to death at Delos by a humorless Turk—but, quoth she, "he was revenged!" She had hunted all over Asia Minor until, in 1921, she got scent of her quarry in the backroom of a café. There (she described to me the odor of incense and hookahs) she had him slaughtered before her eyes (eyes which, at that time, were at the very apex of their beauty) by a Yugoslav (her lover—an assassin whom she had ensnared with an eye to this event) with a knife (a death far too merciful, she swore with spirit), this Turkish object (a handsome fat young man, unquestionably a homosexual—"These Turks!—You can imagine, my child!") of all this hate and hullaballoo. She spoke carelessly of her trials in ridding herself of the supercilious Yugoslav, and of her return to Brindisi.

I was stupefied by this avalanche of events. To have lived such a life—and I divulge but the sketchiest details—seemed to me the ultimate in bliss. I felt exposed to the



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world for the first time and believed sincerely that, but for my father, I too might have been an adventuress. And what lent credence to this wretched bombast was the radio. Soft and falsely tragic voices filled my ears, speaking simply, movingly, of love and misery and death, comparing eyes to stars, knives to flashes in the night, and death to darkness. I was overcome, and adopted the habit of coming up every evening to listen to it. At first I pretended to investigate her cooking, then would let myself be persuaded to stay. In this way I learned little by little the details of Madame Papaphotides' existence; for example, she fooled with the cards every morning and acted according to their signs. Yet her insincerity was blatant, and her predictions preposterous. On top of everything else, she pretended to a regal income and a clientele confined to high society, and avowed that her waiting room, so wretched despite its purple curtains, crystal, and a flood of pompoms, was invariably jammed to the rafters. On the other hand, she was forced to take in a roomer, a starveling impresario and cabaret singer. And in the end I could no longer tolerate her incredible boastings, though I continued to come and listen to the radio dramas. False as they were, I found them entertaining.

The roomer, when he was present—and he was often present—would always join us. He was, at forty, a miserable puppet, thin as a knife blade and so unusually ugly that I am still astonished at the attraction he held for me. He was very obsequious towards the fortune-teller who, at that time, spoke to us constantly of her regard for "la Norma". Though I had never heard of "la Norma", I soon had all the details. She lived in the Via Borghese, in a private house, and went about exclusively with the Roman aristocracy. She was fatally attractive to men, though she did not exploit them for their money (she was extremely wealthy, however, thanks entirely to this asset) and was only curious to determine if one could love her sufficiently to turn over to her his entire fortune (preferably hereditary).

I was exalted by her success, and the singing roomer took advantage of me. He put the idea of singing into my head.

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He convinced me that my warm and raucous voice would enrapture the public, and that he was just the man to free me from my despair. I would become a star. I would experience stagefright (for some reason I coveted the feeling of stagefright, and he related on numerous occasions the words of a French actress to a novice: "You're not afraid, my child? Well, the day you have anything to offer, you'll be afraid, don't worry about that!"). He taught me songs, and how to conduct myself on stage, how to accent my voice and lyrics with stance and gesture. Madame Papaphotides accompanied me on her piano. And then one evening I came to listen to the radio, and the fortune-teller wasn't there. This Amadio informed me that she was at Norma's house for a seance. Meanwhile, he hypnotized me to the tune of the advertisements on the radio. I was exposed to stockings and this charming singer, staple foods and this charming singer, corsets and chewing gum and this charming singer. Little by little he overcame my resistance. I crept closer to him, and pressed myself to his chest. I placed my lips on his, but since I had no idea how to go about it, he soon retreated. Desperate, I fell to my knees on the sofa and pounded a dirty cushion with all my might. Then he came to me, and I let him do it. That is, I didn't care what he was thinking in my absorption with what he was doing. There were his lips and his hands and his body, and I let myself be caressed—what more can I say? I became the true "me", I let myself go. He hurt me, but even when I was afraid of bleeding I clung to him.

And now I knew all about pleasure, but Amadio—have I told you that this was the roomer's name?—changed his attitude entirely. When he wasn't distant and silent, he was rude and arbitrary. Either he addressed me harshly or pretended I wasn't there at all. He was irritated by whatever I did, and treated me like dirt. Since he didn't agree that eventually I might soften his attitude, I was afraid he wanted nothing more to do with me. Yet I admired this intransigence, its virility attracted me. Besides, I could gloat about my father, and the happy circumstance that my lover and I

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did not love each other; in my joy at deceiving my father, I imagined all sorts of delightful possibilities. The idea that Amadio might be a pimp was enough to make me laugh aloud in the streets, or when a servant was paying me for a delivery, or even during one of Amadio's silences (and this would anger him all the more), but it was especially delightful when I was convulsed at the table, in front of my father himself. And I was blissfully happy that first evening, when he could not have known what had happened to me.

I watched him carefully. You can't imagine what pleasure it gave me. And then one evening while I was preparing dinner (for now that I was living in a lie, I took great pains to come home early and fix the dinner nicely, better than ever, in order to savor those compliments from my father heretofore reserved for Angela—indeed, he had come to treat me like Angela. I no longer wore an expression of revolt but smiled the way she did, with smug assurance, so that he lost confidence in his domination of me and imagined he was growing old.)—anyway, on this particular evening, my father came home with my mother and sister. They went through the kitchen without a word, and I heard them enter the adjoining room. There was something unusual afoot, for in their baskets I had noticed a number of large candles, but I went on working as if nothing was wrong. Then my father entered the kitchen and covered the mirror with a sheet, the way one does when there is death in the house. He paid no attention to me, not the briefest glance. When he had gone, I went to the door and looked around. Every mirror was covered. The door to my room was opened wide, and I saw my bed lit up by the candles and my mother immobile at its foot, telling her beads in a muted voice. Upon the bed sat a suitcase into which Anglea was piling my belongings.

I burst out laughing, but I felt my laugh to be painfully loud, and it resounded within me in broken echos, colliding like the sounds of sobbing in one's ears. And for some reason, I had the sudden impression of howling with laughter in a church.

Angela took up the suitcase and approached me. I lo-

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cated a cigarette in my purse, which lay on the table in the living room, and lit it, inhaling and leaving it dangling from my lips. Then I removed it, saying,

"What's gotten into you?"

"Somebody told him you were sleeping with the singer. He came to the laundry with the candles and said to us, 'In my eyes, Assunta is dead. She has slept with the singer. Somebody told me. She is dead in my sight.' And he turned toward Mama and said to her, 'Didn't I tell you? Now you can see for yourself how evil she is, you who have always claimed that your kids were better than others, and now you see that I was right. But you are stupid and lazy, an egoist, and all our children have deserted us because of you. You've given birth to cruel ungrateful pigs! Pigs, do you hear!' And he did not speak to me but treated me like a pig as well, and his eyes were wet and his voice was broken and he repeated over and over again, Assunta slept with the singer. Somebody told me."

I puffed on my cigarette.

For he believed what was told him. He didn't even bother to come and ask me about it, though that would have been so simple. Not that I would have expected it. All I wanted to do was to tell him to his face that I had lied to him for the past three months.

And I laughed.

"I have been humiliated here, burned alive by humiliation, and disgraced in the street as well. With these filthy rags I have to wear, like some beggar child. And in all the pantries where I delivered the laundry and was looked down upon by everyone. Well, now that's finished. I'll be in the limelight, and I'll enchant all who hear me, and when my name is spoken the memory of my voice will cause a stir!"

And I laughed and smoked, and I was happy.

"And you, you'll stay right here. You'll slave, and struggle for a living. And nobody will marry you, and you know it, you know it—even *he* will have contempt for you. Everyone will be disgusted with you, wherever you go."

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Then she averted her gaze and her expression stiffened and she began to shake her head slowly back and forth.

"But you, Assunta," she said. "You are a whore, and I've kept something, at least. But you're a whore and you'll always be a whore. But I've kept something."

"No, Angela, you haven't got a thing, because you're going to be all alone. You're not even diligent, Angela, you haven't got the qualities people say. You're just a woman who will scrape together a little money in order to avoid the institutions when you are old. Just enough money so that one of your nephews might make up to you hypocritically, and pet you. You're so modest and reasonable, Angela, and you haven't a thing, you'll never have a thing."

I took my suitcase, but she would not let me leave. She seized me by the wrist and twisted my arm up behind my back and forced me across the apartment toward our father. Then I got away. Angela pursued me in the light of the candles, and we ran between my mother and father at prayer. We ran around them, and I cried out, afraid, as she seized me and hurt me, bringing me to my knees before my father.

I screamed.

I was certain that nothing could save me from his anger. But then she released me and I went to the door, too exhausted to go further.

And now she was shrieking at my father. She insulted him. She called him a bastard, and I think she repeated this over and over, a thousand times, and each time the word laced me like a whip until my body shook and I could stand it no longer, and then she said.

"You're not going to let her leave after what she's said to me. You're not going to let her leave, do you hear, you old bastard? And you treated me like a pig as well as her because you knew she was right! But who ruined me, you bastard, answer me that! You old bastard, who ruined me, who covered me with dirt? Answer me! Answer me."

And Angela struck him, again and again, then took his head between her hands and shook it with all her might. Then she sank to the floor. She was embracing his knees

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now, and begging him not to let me leave, begging him to whip her for being bad, begging him not let me join my lover. But he did not move, continuing to pray in a low voice. She rose to her feet. Seeing her face, I was afraid, and ran away.

## IF BY THIS WANTON SURGE

If by this wanton surge
Devised for man and beast
When first a green world told
Through blossomings of seasons
Her nature would endure,
We pay no heed to clamor
Outside the bolted door
But urge our soft play wild
And shout out love is bold,
Who cares if a city riots
And speaks of an ivory tower?
This room is all we hold.

Let gravest matters impending
Destroy for whom they will
The glad voice veiled in stone;
If rumor of quick disaster
Or spell of a flourishing market,
The prospect of tumbling down,
Divert the milling crowd
From all the ageless wonder
Inherent in the bone,
We beg no special treaty
But plead through wordless hours
They leave our night alone.

—David Lougée

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# MISTRAL AND MERMAIDS

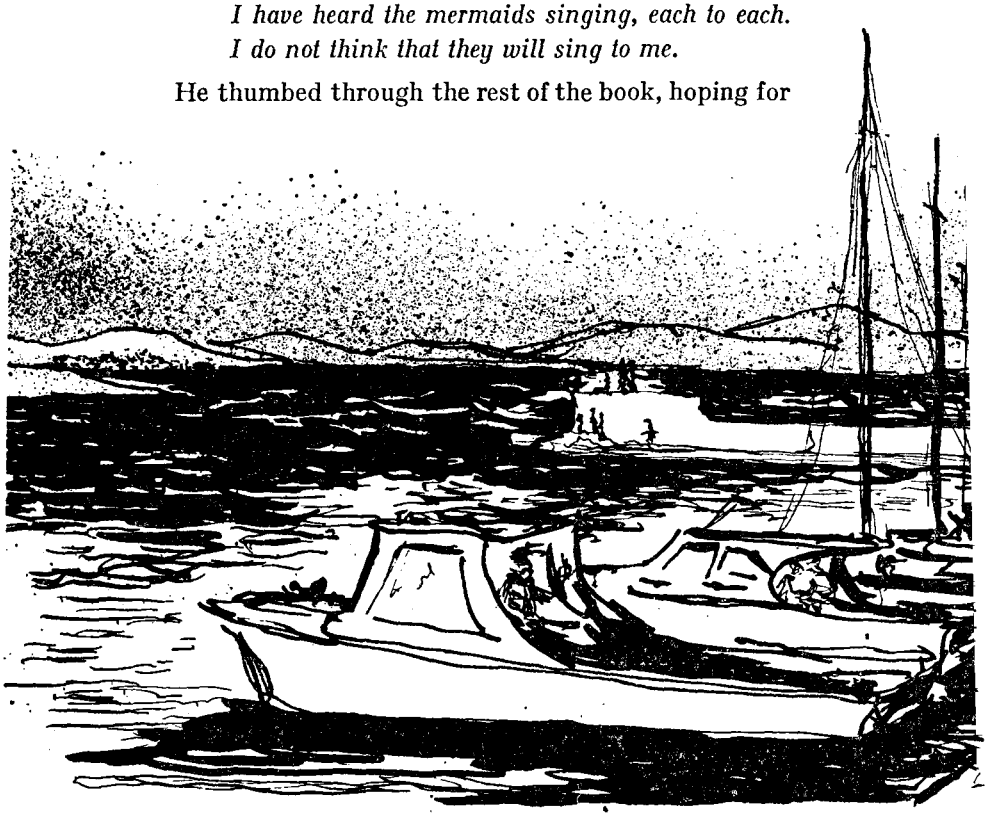
THE pension dining room was cave-like, hung with fishing nets and glass floats, receding backwards to the dark kitchen. He propped up against the water carafe a book which he had taken at random from a shelf of English paper-backs in his bedroom. Modern verse. He would have preferred a newspaper, but it was just something to look at, to prevent him from staring blankly while he drank his coffee.

He was angry at himself for not enjoying St. Tropez. Here it was, an ancient fortified town, sunbaked, curious, typical of the Midi. There were leathery peasant women in black shawls, waddling through crumbling streets with baskets of fruit on their heads, there was everything to excite his northern blood, yet somehow he could make none of it seem real.

Somebody had encircled two lines with a red pencil:

*I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.*
*I do not think that they will sing to me.*

He thumbed through the rest of the book, hoping for



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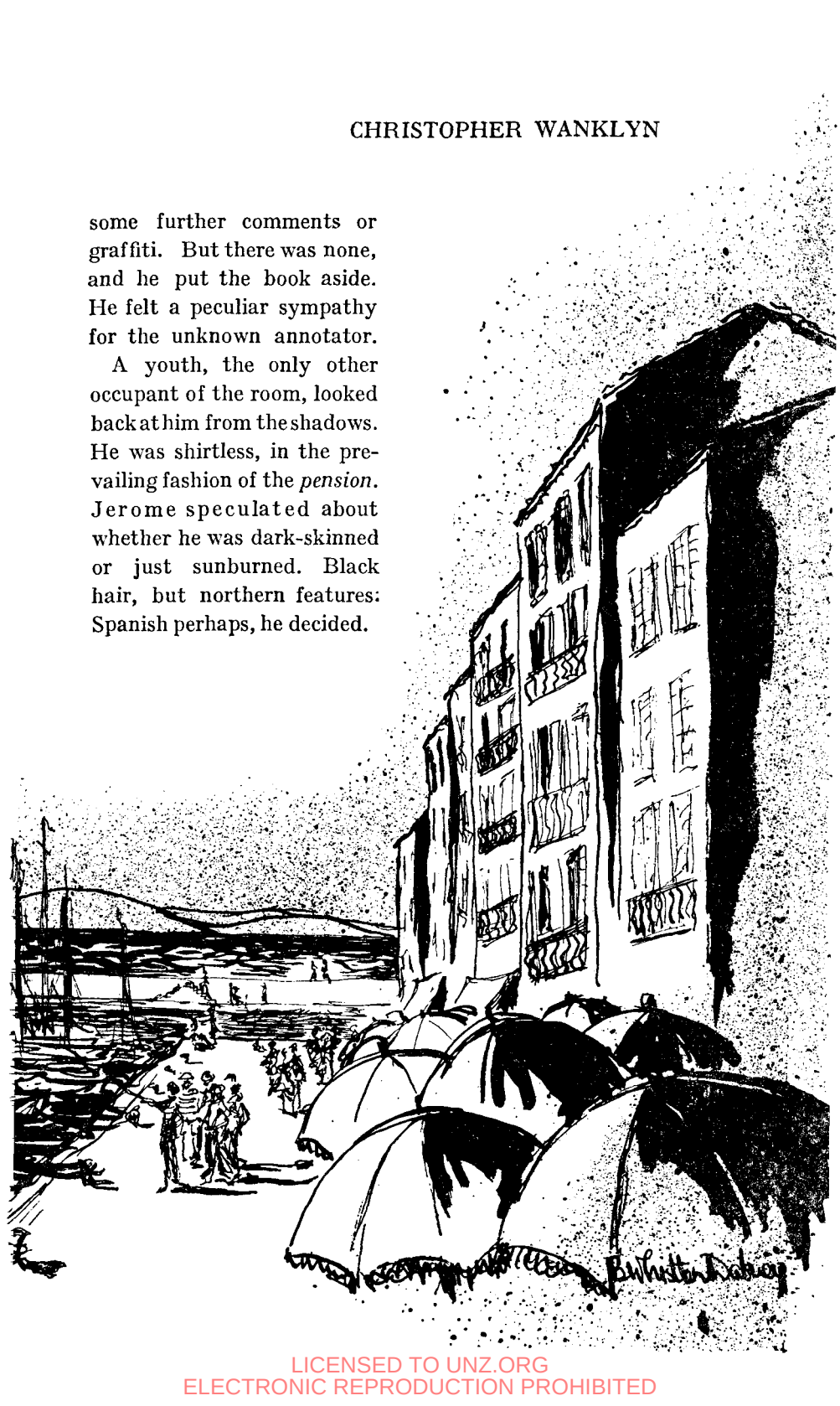
some further comments or graffiti. But there was none, and he put the book aside. He felt a peculiar sympathy for the unknown annotator.

A youth, the only other occupant of the room, looked back at him from the shadows. He was shirtless, in the prevailing fashion of the *pension*. Jerome speculated about whether he was dark-skinned or just sunburned. Black hair, but northern features: Spanish perhaps, he decided.



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The young man got up, walked towards Jerome and the exit. At the window he paused listlessly.

"*Pardon,*" said Jerome. "*Vous connaissez la meilleure plage ici? Celle que j'ai trouvé hier n'étais pas tellement propre.*"

"Depends whether you're on foot, or if you have some kind of transportation," said the boy.

Jerome laughed. "Yes, I'm on foot. I wondered what nationality you were. English?"

"Egyptian," said the boy. "I study in England. What I do is rent a bicycle—that way you can get to two beaches about five miles away. They're both good."

"Nothing closer?"

"Not a beach. But I often swim from the pier—over on the other side of the harbour."

Jerome finished his coffee.

"I'm going there now," the Egyptian boy said. "I could show you the way."

"Might as well. Thanks."

They talked, walking through the harbour, past an uneven chorus line of rolling and swaying yachts. The Egyptian's name was Allac, he said. His cheerful enthusiasm about St. Tropez left Jerome willing to listen without having to force his comments of agreement. Then they walked out on a pier that was banked high above the water. Below them on one side was a roadway and on the other, large square blocks of stone had been heaped at random.

Wind brushed them, scooped foam from the tips of waves.

"Mistral," said Allac.

A young blonde girl passed, going the opposite way on the road below. Allac called a casual greeting in French.

Had she heard? Allac glanced back briefly, and Jerome noticed a shadow of annoyance crossing his features.

At the end of the pier they took off their clothes and put rocks on top of them. The wind felt somehow rich and sinister to Jerome as he leaned into it, letting it blow warmly against him.

Others had arrived, with whom Allac was speaking French.

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They were members, Jerome supposed, of the group Allac had told him about having so easily met. Philippe, Marthe, Fres: all under twenty. Sitting, he extended his hand to each. Casual, detached French youth: their brief motion was more of casting off a hand than of grasping one, with their heads already turned to some other conversation.

Allac: "You do speak French?"

"After a fashion."

He followed their disjointed chatter. Meeting for the first time that day, they had not yet warmed to intimacy. They were curt, almost rude to each other, after the fashion of the time. 'Never get too deep into anything' they seemed to say by their tone. They parried each others' thrusts at their own isolation with faint cynicism, and preserved their distrust intact.

They swam. Jerome followed Allac's dive in a spot he would not have chosen to go first, and lay in the water letting the bouyant waves toss him. Allac swam strongly out and back, out and back.

Jerome climbed back on the pier and sat by Philippe.

"*Il nage bien*," said Philippe, nodding to Allac in the water. He had a young almond shaped face with an untidy crop of fur on his cheeks. His adolescence was graceless, and his features, unformed and pimply, seemed to mirror an unresolved conflict of influences. He was no younger than most of the others in the group, but he was less hardened to their manner, Jerome felt, or else he would not have let fall that admiring comment.

They were joined in a moment by Allac, and began to talk of the girl he and Jerome had passed earlier, who was now approaching them down the pier.

"She is American?" asked Philippe.

Allac shrugged. "Half American I think. She hardly speaks it now."

The girl came towards the group, paused for a moment near it in order to be seen, then tossed down her towel and bag and stretched disdainfully on the rocks outside its perimeter.

Allac turned to her. "You don't say *bonjour* these days?"

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"I said *bonjour*," she said crossly. "You didn't listen." And she lay back looking at the sky. The group closed in on its own conversation.

There was wind trouble. Papers folded themselves over and flew away, towels and discarded clothes tugged at their anchors.

"Will you hold these while I swim?" said the little blonde, getting up. And she handed them a bunch of towels and clothes, as well as an open leather sack. Philippe took these, and removed an American passport from the top of the sack, with a childish exclamation of delight.

"*Non*!" You leave that alone!" she cried, pouting. They struggled for it, and she snatched it away, finally giving it to Jerome.

"You keep it. And don't let him have it." She turned and dived expertly into the water.

"Let *me* have it," said Allac, quite firmly.

Jerome wondered how much there was between them.

"Can't," he said. "It's a trust. I must guard it." He opened the passport tantalizingly. Allac seized it from him and read it, surprise showing in his eyes.

"Fourteen, she's only fourteen!"

Philippe craned over to look, and Jerome tried to read the emotion in Allac's face. There was no sign he felt he had made a fool of himself over the girl. A trace of amusement perhaps. Respect, he decided finally—appetite whetting respect. So young, she had played her hand so well: then he would show her.

Allac stared across the bay. The pastel clutter of Ste. Maxime was visible on the other side. "How long would it take to swim across?" he mused.

Jerome looked at the distance. Four kilometers, perhaps five.

"Longer than *I* could spare," he said. Philippe shrugged, and they went on to talk of other things, of ages.

"I'm just past the time when I used to add years on," said Allac ingenuously. "Now I'm eighteen it doesn't matter.

"You look older," Philippe said.

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"How old are you?"

"Seventeen," Philippe answered defensively.

Jerome was not brought into this exchange. With slight annoyance, he saw that this was not from lack of curiosity, but out of deference.

"I'm getting to the time when I shall have to start deducting," he said with an unconvincing laugh.

"*Comment*?" said Philippe, politely disparaging.

"Twenty-nine," he said.

"A man's in his prime until thirty-five," said Allac gallantly.

Jerome withdrew a bit then to watch and listen, as the fourteen year old returned from the water.

"I should think, four hours," Allac was saying, looking speculatively across the bay.

A French boy was passing, one who had not been in the group before. "It's nothing," he said contemptuously, "Easier than from Cannes to the Island, and they get every man and his dog doing that. One hour and a half, I've done it myself." And he went on arrogantly, without waiting for a reply.

Jerome missed the following conversation, until the little blonde girl said petulantly to Allac: "Oh why do you keep talking about it when you have no intention of doing it?" at which the subject was dropped.

A few minutes later, Jerome was lying on his back in the water enjoying the rising and falling of the waves.

"Getting rough," he said to Allac, who had been swimming around him.

"Yes, a bit cold. Think I'll swim around a bit and warm up." And he set out, doing a powerful crawl.

It was not until five or ten minutes later, when Jerome had come out of the water and dried himself, that he thought to look for the Egyptian. First, he decided that he must have come ashore; then, between the waves he caught a glimpse of the swimming figure, already far out and still going away from land.

The blonde girl looked up. "*Il est fou. Il va à Ste. Maxime.*"

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"I'll bet he won't," said one of the others. "Not in this sea. He'll come back."

The girl shrugged: none of her affair in any case.

Ten minutes later, Allac's continued progress out to sea had become an established conversation point.

"He *is* going," the girl said, more than once, as somebody stood up to look. And though her comment carried a trace of pride, she added always the absolving rider: "*Quel idiot*!"

Half an hour, perhaps. The mistral had mounted steadily. The yellow speck appeared less often between the white-capped mounds of water. It was hard to be sure, but Jerome could see no signs that the swimmer had turned around. Before he disappeared entirely, Jerome measured that he was some twenty degrees off the direct course to Ste. Maxime, in the direction of the open sea.

The youths chattered and joked amongst themselves. Sometimes one of them would look out to sea. "*Quel idiot*!" someone would say.

For a few moments, Jerome toyed with the notion that it was none of his business, then, angry against the callousness of the group, he decided to accept his involvement. He approached Philippe, who had seemed more particularly a friend of Allac than any of the others.

"I'm worried," he said, looking out towards Ste. Maxime.

Philippe looked at him gratefully. "I am too."

"We must do something. That wind is getting stronger."

"Yes."

They both stared at the buffetting ocean, leaning slightly to the wind.

"Can you see him?"

"Not any more."

"We can't just do nothing..."

"No."

A sailboat appeared tilting precariously and travelling at speed, coming from the direction where Allac had last been seen.

"Perhaps he will have been picked up," said Jerome.

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"We'll wait until it passes the point here; then if he isn't aboard we'll have to try and get a boat out."

Philippe nodded reluctant agreement; then he looked around at the still laughing and chattering group as though he wished he could slip back among them.

Jerome followed his glance. Two of the boys were wrestling, spurred on by the little blonde. His anger rose against them, against the curtain of non-recognition they had drawn about themselves. They made it difficult to feel that Allac was in serious danger.

The sailboat swept past the corner, and the crew, struggling with ropes to come about, did not heed their shouts. At any rate they could see that Allac was not aboard.

"All right then, we'll have to get a boat."

"Yes."

He started down the quay at a fast walk, wondering why he did not run. It seemed necessary to gauge exactly what degree of seriousness the situation had come to. He looked back. Philippe was sitting down on the quay where they had last spoken.

So it's my pigeon, he said to himself, and broke into a run.

The first boat he reached along the jetty was a big cabin cruiser with a man in a blue cap kneeling on top of the cabin, fixing a radio aerial.

"Are you going out?" Jerome asked him.

"I've just come in," said the man. "What do you want?"

"Someone out in the bay," said Jerome. "Trying to reach Ste. Maxime I think, and the wind's coming up strong."

"*Mon dieu*!" He looked out at the water, straightened up on his haunches and pushed back his cap to scratch the top of his bald head.

Jerome felt a surge of relief and fellow feeling towards this man. Someone else was alarmed.

"This boat's too big," the man said. "Anyway I can't go out just now. You'll want the lifeboat. Do you know where the *Bureau du Port* is?"

"No."

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The man leaped lightly down to the jetty. "Come on," he said, opening the door of a car, "I'll take you there."

The *Bureau du Port* was a small office with a glass front on the quayside. The door was locked, and nobody was inside.

"Damn them," said the man. "Isn't that just like them?"

He glanced quickly at his watch. They hurried across to the quayside where the swaying yachts were beam to beam, sterns in to the quay. Jerome was content to follow, not knowing for whom the man was searching. Then the man had stopped, and was in conversation with an old sailor, who at that moment was engaged in pulling in a small rowboat by its rope. The sailor had shrugged.

The blue-capped man was furious. "Call yourself a sailor? If you were a Breton..... In Brittany they are sailors, they know something of the brotherhood of the sea."

In reply: a shrug.

There was now a small gathering, a semi-circle of people focussing a beam of moral indignation upon the old sailor.

The sailor bristled with anger. He raised a hand. He shouted.

Blue-cap responded. He was on the side of right. He had backers, to whom he turned in gestures of appeal, drawing nods and comments to support him. He extended an eloquent arm to Jerome. "This man...his friend..."

Jerome found himself wanting to say: no, not my friend—a person only, no more to me than to you.

The beam of moral indignation began to lose its focus. The meeting changed into a forum with a tone of earnest polemic. The semi-circle closed in with blue-cap, ranting, in the centre. Jerome, outside it, saw the old sailor tie up his boat and walk away.

How long now? he wondered. He tried to form an image of Allac struggling alone, a small figure in an alpine sea.

A dark-featured man, his face widely open, eyebrows cocked with vulgar curiosity, had edged towards the centre of the crowd; then registering obvious dismay, he found himself caught. Across his sweater was written 'La Gazelle'.

At first he flatly refused to do anything. But finally,

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under the withering force of public opinion, he agreed with bad grace to take Jerome in his boat.

He climbed aboard a launch, and the rally dispersed.

"Not that one," said the boatman sourly, "here."

Scrambling over to the next boat, Jerome wondered whether this man owned it or ran it for someone else. He wondered also whether he would be made to pay something.

There was trouble with the anchor, which had become fouled on the bottom. Jerome, the boatman and the boatman's friend tugged at the chain for ten minutes, but could not lift it. Then, leisurely, as though they were preparing for a pleasure cruise, they unhoooked the chain from the boat and passed it across to be made fast to the next one.

"Well, where is he?" said the boatman as they finally nosed out between the other craft.

"Around the jetty, then in the direction of Ste. Maxime. He might be half way—but he was drifting towards the open sea with the wind."

The boatman snorted. "One swimmer in a sea like this: hopeless waste of time. *Sacré idiot!*"

As they turned the corner by the jetty the boat began to toss. Jerome stood up on one of the front seats, clutching the top of the windscreen, but it was too early to see anything yet.

He looked back to the jetty, to the place where the group had been. They were still there. A dark haired figure stood among them.

Jerome's heart sank. Allac? Had he after all returned while all the furor had been going on by the quayside? He waved, shouted, but had no reply. The boatman looked at him with questioning and irritation in his eyes.

"Turn in—just for a moment. May be him," said Jerome.

"For God's sake make up your mind. Is your friend drowning or sitting in the sun?"

He turned the boat. Continuing to shout, Jerome saw the faces on shore looking at him blankly. Not Allac, some other person.

"Not him, turn out again. *Pardon.*"



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The boatman swung the wheel, then let it go for a moment in order to throw up his hands.

They tossed and surged forwards. Spray clouded his glasses, and he had nothing but his finger to wipe them with. About two kilometres from St. Tropez, half way across, Jerome suggested to the boatman that they start a zig-zag course. The boatman ignored his directions and drove churlishly onwards.

Jerome stood on the swaying boat, picturing how a swimmer would behave in a sea of this size. He would have no idea of distances, seeing only a landscape of waves, each one a test of strength, each one carrying in its crest the gulp of suffocation that a false breath might take in, the seed of panic.

He checked himself, realising that he was pandering to his imagination when he should be methodically scanning the visible area of water, degree by degree. A life was at stake: why could his gorge not register this urgency? Even scanning now as methodically as he could manage from his writhing vantage point, he knew that his mind was fuller of an imagined swimmer, of his conflict with the surly boatman, than with any real anxiety.

"It's no use," said the boatman. "Can't go on like this all day. I've got to have lunch." He spun the wheel and the boat turned sharply about.

"*B'en alors...*" Jerome imitated the French with his arms. "A question of life and death and you talk of lunch."

But it was no use. His appeal was sabotaged from within by his feeling of being disconnected with the drama. Instead he found himself enjoying his own colloquial facility in using the contemptuous 'tu'.

"Never find anything in these waves," said the boatman, and drove stolidly back towards St. Tropez.

For a moment, Jerome thought wildly of seizing the wheel, struggling with the boatman; but it was not as a possible course of action only as what, perhaps, he should have done.

The boatman steered his launch slowly back through the calm water between the yachts. It was some time before

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Jerome was able to reach the deck of another boat and make his way to the quay.

His straying consciousness observed with sharp clarity how the people on the yachts, though packed together, managed on each one to achieve absolute privacy. They stretched out carelessly eating and drinking, oblivious to the soft sway of their boats, smug and abandoned in their minor Edens of luxury.

Alone again, he knew that the moral indignation trick was impossible now. Had not the boatman taken this worried idiot out to look for his swimming idiot friend, *hein*? And what good had it done?

A policeman in uniform came cycling along the quay. Jerome stopped him, and tried to explain his predicament.

"That may be," said the policeman, "and I will tell you something my friend: it is forbidden to promenade through the streets in bathing-drawers." And he cycled away.

An hour and a half. There was Allac in the waves: there was himself on the shore. The affair was entirely between them now.

He went into a café, and stood among dribbling seconds by the empty counter. He banged, waited; moved to a closed door and shouted: "Hey!"

A man opened the door.

"I want to use a telephone—to call Ste. Maxime."

"What number?"

"Is there a lifeboat station?"

"No. That's here."

"And it's shut. Nobody in it."

The barman's face brightened with interest. Another man had come through and joined him behind the bar. "Why?" What's the matter?"

"Someone swimming across the bay. The wind came up after he started."

"Your friend?"

"My pigeon."

After a second's hesitation, the barman jumped to it. "*Alors, c'est sérieux*!" he said.

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Welcomes excitement, thought Jerome. A deficiency, like vitamins.

The barman and his friend had a rapid conversation about where somebody was to be found. The three of them left the café and walked rapidly along the quayside. The barman talked eagerly over his shoulder to passers-by as they walked, and soon there was a little crowd trotting along with them, whipping up excitement among themselves.

"And how long has he been out?"

"An hour and a half, perhaps two," said Jerome. "I have no watch." Then he had to explain about the boatman.

They came to a man at the far end of the quay, who seemed to be the object of their search. He was consulted; he looked impressed. He knew about such things. "*Le Capitaine de Port,*" he announced authoritatively. "He is in charge of the lifeboat, of the whole port, of all such affairs."

His case had reached the Supreme Court. Democracy in its slow and devious ways would triumph. The town's elders would sit in council, dignified and solemn, and decide: 'Allac—does he exist?'

Jerome went off alone with this new authoritative person back down the quay and up a winding street into the town to the house where the *Capitaine de Port* lived.

They arrived at a small cobbler's shop, and knocked at the door. They knocked again. A voice from upstairs announced that it was having its dinner. The authoritative person vouched for the urgency and importance of his mission. The voice gave out a wordless comment against the complexity of modern times that so beleaguer important officials.

After a moment the door opened, and a silver-haired, wiry old man in slippers and a high necked sweater faced them. A remarkable old man, who could both smoke a pipe and eat his dinner at the same time.

Prisoner's Friend put the case for him. Monsieur le Capitaine nodded sagely, puffing. "*Je comprends,*" he said. He turned politely to Jerome. "And what is it that you would like me to do?"

"Send out the lifeboat."

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"Send out the lifeboat? Send out the lifeboat! Ah! Nothing easier, my friend. Nothing easier for *you* to say to *me*—send out the lifeboat. You will understand, that it is *I* who send out the lifeboat. That it is *I* who have the responsibility, when the lifeboat goes out. One must reflect a little. I should send out the lifeboat for every... you will excuse me, silly fool, who swims out of his depth? *Ah non*!"

He was emphatic. He replaced his pipe and crossed his arms. Jerome's turn.

"What is your lifeboat for, then?"

The Captain skirted this. "I suppose you encouraged him," he said. "*Je connais cette jeunesse.*"

"I didn't, but what does that matter? A man is drowning between St. Tropez and Ste. Maxime, isn't that enough?"

"Aha!" cried the Captain, spreading wide his arms.

"Between St. Tropez and Ste. Maxime—but where? Can you tell me that? The bay is big. Where is the lifeboat to find a single swimmer in such a bay?"

A yellow liquid dart landed splat beside Jerome's foot.

"Two hours you say? *B'en*—either he is at the bottom of the sea, in which case what is the use of sending out the lifeboat, *hein*? *Je vous demande*? Or he has reached the other side." He turned in appeal to Prisoner's Friend, who had by this time come to the point when he had something very pressing to do.

"I just brought him here, as he asked," Prisoner's Friend said sheepishly. He nodded to them both and walked away.

"Nonsense," said Jerome. "He's a strong swimmer, he could stay afloat for hours. But in this wind he couldn't have reached the other side by now. He might be carried out, far off his course."

"Look," said the Captain, leaning forward confidentially and tapping Jerome on the chest. "I'm an old man. I've been swimming for forty years. No, more. Say fifty years. Fifty five perhaps. Don't tell me about swimming. I *know* that the waves don't make make *one per cent* of difference to a good swimmer... Carried out? Pah! For a rowing boat,

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yes. Ah! For a rowing boat, there is a different story. That would be dangerous. *That* would be something for the lifeboat, something it could find. Why, I've seen twenty, thirty rowing boats in distress in my time, people drowned. *Les jeunes gens sont stupides...*"

"There's a boy in trouble in the middle of the bay, a life in danger. I've come to you for help."

"But of course!" cried the Captain, all benevolence. "I am sympathetic for your problem. I am desolated... Your friend... it's worrying. Everybody has his troubles. *Mais, je vous demande...* What am I to do? What *can* I do?"

"Send out the lifeboat."

"Send out the lifeboat, so easy, send out the lifeboat. Now I'll tell you confidentially. I've had a lifetime of experience. The waves make *three per cent* of difference to a good swimmer. That's all, three per cent..."

"A man is drowning..."

Gently, the Captain retired into the dark doorway, firmly he closed the door, muttering all the time: "And I ask you, what am I to do?"

Slowly now, Jerome walked down the winding street towards the quayside. He was in Paris, on the Boulevard St. Germain, signalling for two more beers. 'Imagine,' he was saying to his companion, 'out of all those people, not one... I began to think it was *me* that had some kind of insane obsession. One begins to lose one's bearings...'

'And what finally happened?' his companion asked.

Jerome stopped, and looked at the row of yachts, still gently rising and falling. No, he thought, not again. Then, because he had to move in one direction or another, he walked out along the pier again, to where they had gone swimming. There was always the possibility of finding Allac sitting there, unconcerned, the possibility that it was, after all, just a nightmare.

The group had all gone. There were his own clothes, and off in another desolate heap, the running shoes, the towel, the shorts of Allac. He looked out to sea. No matter. The affair would not end in disaster, he told himself, it would peter

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out. He put his clothes on, and carrying Allac's under his arm, walked back along the pier.

And if it had been his brother, or his son, he asked himself, would he now be walking slowly back composing a letter to *Le Figaro*? He would have walked aboard the first yacht of the row, and put his hand to the throat of the owner. He would have talked of francs when the boatman talked of lunch.

Well, but it was not his brother. Alas Allac, it was not even him. The struggle had been with himself, for himself, all along.

Suddenly he felt almost happy. He had been carrying a pretence in his mind from the start: now he recognized that Allac's life was little more than an abstract thing to *him once the boy was out of sight. Acknowledging this,* some dimly understood burden of constraint seemed to have lifted from him.

"I salute you my friend," he said softly, "*mais enfin je dois prendre le dejeuner, aussi.*"

In the hotel the dining room was empty, all the guests having by now had lunch. He went to the back and found the concierge.

"I don't suppose the Egyptian boy has come in for lunch?" he asked her.

"No. What time will he be in?"

"I don't know. I don't know if he ever will."

"*Comment*?"

He regretted the theatrical touch. "He was trying to swim across the bay to Ste. Maxime. The sea got rather rough. I don't know what's happened to him."

The concierge was shocked, her motherly nature offended. She put down the tray she was carrying. "But something must be done!" Decision made her round peasant features firm. She was an organizer, ready to bustle into action.

"I've done everything I can think of," said Jerome. And he wearily recounted his morning's experience. "Moreover, it's much too late now. Either he is there or he isn't. Of course, if he does reach the other side, he has a long walk round to get back."

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"And with no shoes—no money, no clothes," the concierge said shrewdly. "I will go on my motor-cycle, to fetch him." She bustled through the back, telling her assistant on the way.

From the courtyard he heard the engine of her machine cough twice, then a diminishing roar as it started and she drove it away.

Alone in the dining room, he was provided with a tasteless meal that had suffered from being re-heated. As he ate, he tried to void his mind of all the morning's activity, to convince himself that he was not interested in its outcome. He was no longer a participant, he told himself; the affair was over.

Yet all the time he was waiting anxiously for the present hiatus to be bridged, his ear cocked for the noise of the concierge's return.

He ordered another carafe of *vin rosé* and some more ice, welcoming the sleepiness the wine was inducing.

Then, when he had finished his lunch and drained the last of the wine, he went upstairs to his room. He was preparing to lie down when he heard the motor-cycle turning into the courtyard below.

There was a prolonged, triumphant honk.

He leaned out of the window. Allac was swinging a bare-foot leg down from the pillion. No, Jerome thought, he could not imagine that brown swimmer's body bloated, lolling at a beach's edge. He looked hardly tired; but his smile was nervous and he seemed to be searching confusedly for words to thank the concierge, who was still perched, proud and maternal, on her machine.

He knew then that he would not use any of the sarcasms he had stored in his mind, nor embarrass Allac with an account of what he had done. None of it, anyway, was the Egyptian's business.

"Have a good swim?" he called, to attract Allac's attention.

The boy smiled sheepishly upwards.

"I left your clothes in the dining-room."

"Thanks." He started to go in. "I nearly didn't make it," he said pausing, then disappeared into the doorway.

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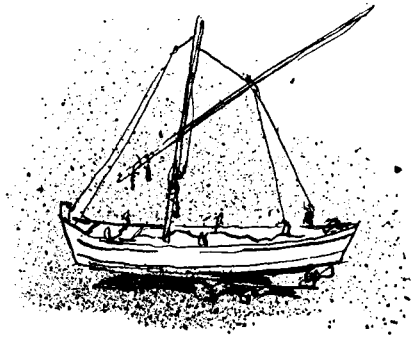
Jerome withdrew from the window and lay on the bed, ready to give way to the drowsiness that was on him. He felt no longer angry, with the boy or with himself. It was right, he thought suddenly, for Allac to risk his life foolishly and perhaps find its value; just as it was right for himself, Jerome, to be tormented back into possession of his own imperfect soul. For a moment he almost envied the Egyptian his struggle. But no, each had done it his own way.

It was all, all of it, quite right, quite right; and as he drifted into sleep he could hear in the distance, quietly on the declining mistral, the voices of the mermaids calling to him.



## WITNESSES

Once, quiet meant discord and pain;
My frantic mind willed hurricane
To blow away its disbelief,
But violence brought it no relief.
How does it happen that a bough
In winter stillness calms me now?

The spirit sees what it has known;
It prints its trials on leaf and stone.
So leaf and stone record for me
The ways I went unwittingly.
What did I find? What do I know
That makes the silence beckon so?

—Cecil Hemley

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# NATHAN ASCH

## THE NINETEEN-TWENTIES : AN INTERIOR

*The Café du Dôme de Montparnasse was exactly like that; no American who was trying to be a writer in Paris in the* 1920s *could fail to recognize the truth of Nathan Asch's picture. Asch himself belonged to a somewhat later group than mine; he was one of the young men, mostly Midwesterners—though he was an exception, having been born in Poland and educated at Syracuse University—who gathered round that remarkable magazine edited by Ford Madox Ford, the* Transatlantic Review. *Later he wrote a number of novels, beginning with* The Office, *that were well received by the critics and had a larger sale in Germany than in the United States; the Germans before Hitler thought that he was a better novelist than his father, Sholem Asch. The Second World War put a temporary stop to his career as a writer. Though overage he enlisted in the Air Force, and though assigned to Public Relations, he flew several combat missions over Germany; he wrote some wonderful letters about his experiences, but didn't publish a word. That was a grave tactical error. When he got home and started writing again, he found that editors and publishers had forgotten his name, and his postwar work—which includes three novels and many stories—has largely remained in manuscript. Some of this unpublished work is extremely good, though it isn't fashionable. This picture of a day at the Dôme is a section of a novel,* Paris Was Home. *Hemingway, who might or might not be recognized as one of the characters in the section, read the novel and had some objections not connected with his own appearance or nonappearance in it. But he also said, "...when Nathan writes about the Dôme at the end and when life was exciting and truly remembered because he was fighting then to be a writer... it is absolutely first rate." It is.*

—Malcolm Cowley

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ON the corner made by the boulevards Montparnasse and Raspail and the rue Delambre, across the street from the large and garish Café de la Rotonde, during those earlier days, was the then smaller place called the Café du Dôme. The Rotonde had new soft benches and polished tables. On the walls it had paintings of nudes, and still-lives of fruit and flowers, and landscapes of Brittany and the south of France. It had a fancy, spacious washroom with a woman in charge. The Dôme was smokestained and gloomy, and beyond the bar the seating part was circular and on different levels, so that if you were looking for somebody, you went up steps and around, glancing at both sides—in the daytime so little light came through that you almost had to lean over a table, peering, to recognize someone—and then down the steps and you were back at the bar. The toilet was down a deep stairs, and at the bottom there were two doors. The Men's part was a narrow square where above a hole in the floor stood out two raised foot soles. You carefully stepped on those, twisted around, let your pants down. For toilet paper you used cut-out leaves of the city directory

The Dôme used to open at five-thirty in the morning. The bakery truck came, and a tray of crescent rolls was set on the counter, to surprise one with still-warmth when one took one to dip into the coffee. Outside in the street light stood a row of all night taxis, their meters covered, and inside, the chauffeurs fortified themselves for the ride home. Their voices were night-air-laden, and when an early worker came in to call out in a just-waked-up voice, "Good day," they slowly turned their heads and did not answer. Beer pipes were being iced, racks of wine brought up, red wine and white wine and mineral water set for quick use under the counter. Even at this early hour some had a shot of wine mixed with mineral water for their breakfast. If it was his early shift, César came in, in a worn black suit, stiff shirt and stained derby hat, stood at the counter for his coffee like anybody else, lifted the glass with shaking fingers and sipped carefully;

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then without his hat and jacket, polished bald head reflecting the light, and his stiff shirt but a dickey, went inside to sweep and mop. A party of all night revelers arrived, filled the Dôme with un-morning-like laughter, called for drinks. When the angry César brought them, they did not drink, but their voices becoming languid and forced, ordered breakfast instead, did not eat it, sat in more silence, aware of César's exasperated banging around them, tired in the midst of the brisk morning. The dawn was greying the street outside, dimming the lights inside. The taxis had gone. At the counter stood clerks from neighborhood stores, concierges from nearby buildings, railroad men from the Montparnasse station, postmen, housewives, models, hardly dressed, hardly awake. A meticulously dressed gentleman arrived, sat down with his back toward the window, placed his folded newspaper at the exact center of the table, waited while César tied on an apron, put on a very worn black jacket; and a napkin on his arm, shuffled to the counter to push through the crowd, brought the coffee pot and the pitcher of hot milk. The gentleman took a pince-nez out of a case in his breast pocket, set the case beside the saucer and picked up the paper. He unfolded it, and began reading the top column on the left. The crowd thinned out at the counter; inside, people began arriving for breakfast or for the day. They drank their coffee quickly, hardly looking at the front page of their newspaper, calling for César to come take their money, or left the sum plus the copper tip and walked out. Or they dawdled picking out their place, trying to picture the day's coming scene from the seat, and sat down at first stiff and strange, as if they were moving to a spot that would take living in and breaking in, without calling for César, anxious that he should not come quickly, so that the few things that would happen through a day of sitting would each have a significance. When finally César stood in front of them, they not only asked for coffee, but also for writing materials, or a knife from the kitchen to cut the pages of a book they had brought. If the one glass of coffee this morning would be the only thing they would order through the day, or if they

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did not even have the necessary change to pay for it and had rehearsed how they would act with César—desperately hoping that this morning he was on the early shift—they made a ceremony of ordering the coffee. They put a sickly grimace on their face and said nothing so that César would be forced to ask how they felt, to which they would reply that they felt badly, they had spent a miserable night—of course César could suggest a quarter of a bottle of mineral water, and when he felt malicious, he did—so that César would say sympathetically, "What I think you need is a little black coffee," and would go off for the glass and the coffee pot. They waited for a businessbound gentleman to leave his newspaper behind him, or they opened the ink-stained writing book, took out the ragged blotter, the three sheets of paper, the two envelopes, unscrewed the ink bottle, dipped the rusty pen and began, staring off into space. When a friend came who they knew was as broke as they were, they pushed their chair a little to the side so that he could sit down, and helped him by setting the empty coffee glass between the two of them so that César would not know who had been having the coffee and would not dare interrupt the excited discussion they were having. But if the friend was getting an allowance from home, maybe had received a check yesterday and had not blown it all on the big party last night, they rose from the chair as soon as he entered the café, and leaned forward over the table, their hand stretched out, so that he would be forced to come toward them, to be grasped by the hand and be pulled sitting down, be helped with suggestions for breakfast, such as the shirred eggs in a sizzling pan the Dôme kitchen cooked so well. The inside corner tables against which no-one bumped passing, and from which one could observe the street door and at least two levels of the café, were taken in the morning and remained taken through the day, the evening and the early night. The empty coffee glasses gathered dead cigarette butts. Here a sheet of paper had been torn nervously in half, then half again and again into tiny bits, which scattered on the floor, on the clothing, on the table and into the glass, and there at a spotless table sat a figure

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immovable through the breakfast hour, who was still there at noon during the apéritif hour, and after lunch, and at the second apéritif hour before dinner, and for liqueurs after dinner, and through the long evening, in the same position, mummy-like oblivious of the passing scene. But mostly each new arrival in the café changed the mood of the place. When the outside door squeaked open, and one glimsed movement between a column and an edge of the protruding wall, one had time to build up expectantly an image before the person circled the café and came to the level where one was sitting. The texture of the clothes had looked unfamiliar, but more, the very movement of the fragment of the figure one had seen, the step forward, had seemed strange and exciting and new. It was an art dealer, he was bored with the pot-boiling painters he was pushing, he wanted someone young and vigorous, a talent he could really back. Of course his conditions would be strange. He would say, "My boy, you've got something, which will take years of developing, but on which I'll take a chance. I'll get you a studio and canvas and paints and food, and I realize that even an artist must have relaxation, so I will provide you with a little friend, a serious young married woman, who is crazy about painters, but who has a jealous husband, so she will not be able to waste too much of your time. But no more café life for you, no more weeks wasted because you feel you must do the female figure now, and do not have the money for a model." It was a business man in Paris from South Africa, from the States, who had made millions in steel, and who was now seeking an interest for his remaining years, who with his keen mind would realize the validity of this plastic form, this solidity, this purpose, and who would propose beginning an art collection using one's work, the very root of the theory, as a nucleus. It was a publisher who was looking for young talent. It was an orchestra conductor on a search for fresh scores. It was some one anonymous who after a long talk would shake hands upon departure, leaving in the palm of one's hand a crumpled thousand-franc note. Or perhaps only order one another coffee. When the new arrival finally

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reached where one sat, he proved to be one of the regulars wearing a new pair of pants. But hope had been stirred, the heart had been lifted, the door of the Dôme was still open, maybe the angel would still come. How some of the regulars existed no one but themselves knew. Where did the Mad Roumanian come from? No one knew whether he was a Roumanian, since no one had ever talked to him, but that was what he was called. He arrived every morning on a bicycle which he chained to a tree outside of the Dôme, and stiffly walked in, one of his baggy pant legs tied with a clip, making him look like half of a zouave, in a short black pelérine, buttons fastened with silk frogs, and a high fur collar. He made the round of the Dôme, turning like a soldier, his eyes left and right, quickly glancing at an occupant of a table, and when he saw it was a woman, bowing and removing his hat. But he kept his hat on and his pelérine buttoned when he sat down and ordered one quarter liter of beer, which was cheaper even than one coffee, remaining thereafter, while the white rim on the beer in front of him expired, absolutely motionless, to the point of not blinking his eyelids. What did the husband do of the woman with the elephantine legs and the little nervous pop-eyed dogs? He was always well-dressed, with white piping on his waistcoat and a flower in his buttonhole, and he loved his wife and her dogs, letting her use him as another cane as slowly she made her way into the Dôme, pushed a chair out for her and eased her into it; then picked up the dogs one by one, setting each on the palm of his hand as if to emphasize his tininess and lifted him to slide him off on the table. The dogs stood on the bright surface, trembling, almost caving in on their pencil-thin legs, while he nuzzled and kissed them, happy if from nearby tables there came gestures of astonishment. Occasionally he carried the dogs outside of the Dôme where he sat them under a tree and watched lovingly while they did their miniature duties, and at one in the afternoon and at eight in the evening he and his wife of the monstrous legs slowly moved toward the Montparnasse station and the Lavenue restaurant for their meals, the dogs stepping daintily before them. But when did he

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have time to go to a bank? How did he ever get that wife of his up a few stairs? Toward eleven o'clock the manager of the Dôme came in. His wife who was cashier was already sitting silently over the cash box, and as she took his hat her large diamond ring flashed from above. The manager said a few words soundlessly to her, clasped his hands back of him, and turned to survey his café. He smelled fresh and looked spotlessly clean, and he balanced himself on the balls of his feet. When he became aware of the man with the wife and the dogs, his eyes shone, his mouth opened, he moved, his hands unclasping themselves. The man rose and took the manager's outstretched hands and shook them. Still holding hands, they sat down, the man whispering into the manager's ear, the manager listening and nodding, after which he rose and again gazed around, his eyes lighting on another table, toward which he again excitedly moved, his hand out. He thus made the round of the café, but he did not shake everybody's hand, although one never knew whether one was being ignored, because sometimes one could not manage to get into the manager's line of vision. The Dôme began filling up for the apéritif hour. On the tables stood buckets of ice and soda siphons. The waiters went with trays laden with saucers, stemmed glasses and bottles of fruit and herb wine. Now the solitary characters at the strategic tables had as their neighbors local businessmen, painters who had given up the lean struggle and made up with the world and were paid off with studios and models and not only rich lunches but even with glasses of pungent appetite-provoking wine, idlers nursing their hangovers with mineral water, tourists agape at this artists' café. The talk that arose was in many languages. An English girl was loudly enumerating the many different kinds of potables she consumed the night before with anesthetic results so that who had taken her to her hotel room and had undressed her and put her to bed, and whether he had profited by her unconscious state, would forever be a mystery to her. An American in a Basque shirt and beret, his feet in Catalan rope sandals reposing on another chair—the unseemliness of the



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position infuriating César—was explaining the French romantic poets to a young Frenchman, who wore a starched collar and had a pimply face. A Dutch art dealer rose to greet his lunch guest who was a sculptor and a Russian Jew, who had lost an eye in the Foreign Legion and was now a French citizen. A couple were quarreling either in Danish or Norwegian. The manager stood at the door and greeted the more substantial clients. For those who arrived who to him were most substantial, he would try to find a table. When the only table even partially vacant had at it one of the penurious regulars, the manager would bow slightly to him and mumble something that might have been an apology and a request for room, to which the regular would return a short, stiff bow, and then look away and above him, and the party would settle down, the lady in the chair with the back to the wall, next to him, the men each nodding to him who appeared not to see them, the manager pulling over a necessary chair from another table. The regular would bring his empty glass to the very corner of the table, almost touching him, and would thus stick out, a proud dry island, oblivious of the waves of effusion that lapped around him, each escort urging on the lady and each other the most elaborate concoctions, cassis wine mixed with vermouth, and lightened with seltzer, or dark bitter picon sweetened with grenadine. The Dôme was not a restaurant, but one could order for lunch the one dish that had been prepared in the kitchen for the staff. César liked to become a restaurant waiter for a change, and it was with a flourish that he cleared the glasses off, leaving only the piled-up saucers, and of course the single glass and saucer of the regular who picked his up himself and miserably held it and set it down again upon the white paper tablecloth César apread out and set with salt cellar, pepper grinder and bread. With the arrival of the daily dish, perhaps boiled beef sprinkled with rock salt, and served with a large mealy potato, the agonizingly slow ceremony of the meal would begin, heard and smelled rather than seen by the rigidly-aloof figure at the corner of the table. The faint grunt of pleasure, the click of silverware handled, the clank of it on

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the plate, the squeal of it holding and cutting, the unheard moment of lifting to the mouth, the sound of mastication, the smacking of the lips, the plop of the cork from the bottle, the gasp of drinking, were combined with the rising steam from the meat and the potato, the odor of cheese and fruit, the fumes of wine, and the deeper intermingling fumes of coffee, brandy and cigar, and torturingly slowed down by table talk and the digesting belch. The drooling, starving regular still held his head high and waited for the never coming addition of the saucers and settlement of the bill, the lunchers' departure, the removal of the breadcrumb-scattered, food and wine-stained tablecloth, during which he again held close to him that glass and saucer of his, and the final return into that emptiness in which he would sit and wait for he knew not what, unseeing. The Dôme was now almost deserted, the manager and his wife had their lunch at one table, and the waiters and the bar-help at another. A few people would return for coffee, but during the early part of the afternoon the place took on a somnolent aspect. Occasionally a stranger from another part of Paris ventured inside its gloom, found seated here and there badly and sometimes strangely dressed figures, would judge this another home of frustration and failure, and would depart for the brighter Rotonde across the street, or for another café of more elegance and verve perhaps across the river. But here was not only time wasted and work abandoned and careers given up. At these tables also breath-taking ideas came, the jagged flash was followed by the blinding brilliance of illumination, the sudden harmony and balance of comprehension, the clear detail of pattern, the rounding out of form. Here sometimes answers did follow questions, and hard certainty came after months of doubt. From neighborhood hotel rooms and studios there did occasionally stagger in men to dissolve the bitter realization of absolute failure in alcohol, to droop daily over mounting piles of saucers, and eventually to disappear. But also from the same hotels and nearby studios came books and plays and stories and paintings and sculptures and musical scores that were to be published, produced, shown

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and played throughout the world, and the creators of them came to the Dôme to think of them. It was time for César, if he was on the early shift, to make his collections. Other waiters simply figured the totals owed them by passing with their successors at the station from table to table and adding up the pink-edged one-franc-seventy-five coffee saucers and the blue-edged four-franc brandy saucers, lifting them slightly and dropping them, so that the china rang warningly of the eventual settlement. They then received from their successors the sum and went off their shift. But César's relation with his clients was a personal one. He had been at the Dôme since long before the first war when the place had been a small meeting place of taxi chauffeurs. He had watched the artists move down to the Montparnasse district from the Butte on Montmartre, the foreigners come from the Latin Quarter. The legend that he owned three apartment houses and was in on the syndicate with the manager to build a magnificent café down the street that would outshine the Rotonde was on a par with the legend that he would be a rich man if he could collect the money owed to him. The truth was that off duty he was a pot-bellied shabby little old man, while at the Dôme he had the dignity and knew it, and was a good waiter, even if rather old. He said his adieux from table to table, the palm of his hand resting lightly and remindingly on the saucers, and one paid him as an aside, talking of something else. At some tables he did not touch the saucers, and some he passed by entirely. In a minute he would again be wearing his old derby hat and his outer coat and standing at the bar for the final coffee, and he was tired and a little sad. However, if this was his day of late shift, he was rested, his face fresh and pink, his bald head shining, and he went from table to table, greeting his clients, happy. Toward four o'clock the whores began coming in. When it was raining, some who were strange to the place wandered in hopelessly, to be off the street, and made one round of the tables, stepping stiffly, bag held tightly under the elbow, head bent in a single oblique look, so that the eyes moving with the body would pass the eyes at the tables below, meeting

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them for an instant of sharp provocation. They then sat down at the table near the door and watched the outside downpour. The whores who were regulars used the Dôme as their home. They sauntered in smilingly, some finished with their shopping, some back from an exercising walk, or after an early afternoon of puttering around the room in their hotel. They greeted César, waved at acquaintances, set themselves in their usual places with a grateful sigh. They ordered coffee, they examined their purchases and showed them around. They called to one another, inquired as to each other's health and state of mind, glancing around their section of the café for likely prospects, but off-handedly, as if this was not their main purpose in being at the Dôme. Indeed sometimes it wasn't, for the time being one was not a whore. One had met the requirements of a sculptor and was now spending the days on a stand naked except for a sheet that was wetted down to simulate draperies. Or, after a night together, one had found herself enthusiastic about a medical student; luckily he was receiving an allowance, one could move in with him, and cook soup on his stove. One had just found a beef bone and some leeks, one was now waiting to go home with him. "Sorry, monsieur, I'm not in the business (using the English word) for the moment." Sometimes a whore brought a pet into the café, a cross-eyed Siamese cat, whose bluish fur she irritatingly fondled, or a tiny chameleon she placed on her neck where it stayed motionless trying to change to the color of her skin. But mostly, after the small flurry of their entrance, the whores relaxed into waiting. They drank their coffee, smoked their cigarettes, lifted their eyes expectantly at the sight or sound of the outer door opening, waiting for the entrant to reach their part of the café, watched if he would sit down back of a table, lift his face toward the approaching waiter, and then look around him, so that the eyes for the first time would meet. Some of them would begin flirting, eyes crinkling, the corners of the mouth raising themselves progressively higher, until the whole face invitingly smiled. Some after the first glance, did not look again at the man until the waiter said the gentleman

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asked permission to offer a drink, or the man rose to approach, bent over with a bow, and asked if he might sit down. Sometimes the woman and the man aware of her proximity would sit for a long time side by side, she studiously looking everywhere but at him, he glancing more and more inquiringly at her, wondering whether the offer of a cigarette or a drink or a remark about the weather or a general off-hand observation about the Dôme, "Don't you think the Quarter is becoming ruined?" or "I find this café has a particular ambiance" would provide the conversation wedge. The before-dinner crowd began to appear, and now the Dôme would remain full until late in the evening. On clear days the painters stayed in the studios until they could use up the last bits of light, but during rainy, murky weather they might come down to sketch at the Dôme. There would be an interesting position of the arms and shoulders in a figure slouching in the corner and an effort made quickly to remember it on paper before the figure lost its spontaneity by freezing, so that a page in the sketchbook would be turned over and another position, of a head lost deeply in a newspaper, noted down. Many of the workers in the studios and rooms now said their first word for the day. Tired of pumping, or wrestling with themselves, and of the closeness of their rooms, of the unshaved indefiniteness of a long questing day, they shaved closely, booted themselves tightly, dressed carefully and appeared at the Dôme to rest. They acted formally, with a flourish of manners, rose when a friend approached them, shook hands with him effusively; when two French painters met, they greeted each other with deference, called each other "Master." When a very great man appeared at the Dôme he received what was almost a court reception. Even while his party still approached outside on the terrace, a stir went through inside, the news united the tables. The manager who had never read a book or looked at a picture in his life sprang to the door; from her cash box above his wife flashed her diamond and smiled. The great figure, deep in a coat and heavy muffler, was escorted to a table quickly cleared, was seated at a chair pushed out, slightly away from

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it, his hat shapeless on his head, his gnarled hands resting on a cane. The café craned its neck, even those who did not consider him a great man at all, but an already rotting corpse, a notorious potboiler, who perhaps had shown promise in his youth, but had outlived both, having sold out for this kind of adulation, even they were uneasy in the presence of world fame. The tone of their voices as they tried to ignore it was strident, strained. Others wanted to know the reason for the stir, who on earth was that? At the table of honor the great man did not look up as he shook hands, as he nodded at something that was whispered to him. The group sitting around him were wreathed in vicarious modesty, in smiles. Then a slight figure among them provoked a deeper stir. Was that she? the fragile wraith with the velvet ribbon around her neck and the girlish curls? princess, countess, wife of the banker, peasant girl? the one of the elopements, suicides, convents? of the sufferings trumpeted and the celebrated anguish? was that the Muse really in her wasted flesh? My God, how old she was! Fascinated they stared at the two skeletons of an immortal love. Somebody mumured, "His work has survived just about as well as she." Irritated and provoked by this devotion to a memory, by worship of tears shed in a never-to-be-recaptured past, a group of obscure youths were giving birth to a new art movement. In Paris from the French provinces, from New Jersey, from a canton in Switzerland, from a small Polish town, their minds limber and their elbows restless, they eargely tore through words and their meanings. They pointed their fingers insolently, they spoke loudly. They wanted to know what was true, what survived. Had that woman, for years moaned about, survived? Either in her present decaying physical state? or in the form, so sickening that it could no longer be borne today, presented to the world by her lover? The answer was obvious. In life as well as in art, in dreams as well as in reality, nothing survived. Nothing, rien, niente, garnichts, nic and nichevo. The truth was nothing, reality was nothing. God and the world of the spirit and the world of hard demonstrated fact, all were nothing. That was fine.

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Let's celebrate the Nothing. Let's write about the Nothing, paint the Nothing, play the Nothing on a clarinet. Let's publish a manifesto, and proclaim that in the beginning there was nothing, and that it has stretched through duration to end finally and irrevocably in nothing They began to plan a demonstration at a forthcoming performance at the Paris Opéra which they would break up by rising in their seats and making insignificant noises, they started working on a magazine which would have a blank colorless cover, and they tried to decide whether the inside pages too would be blank, or whether they would be filled with meaningless single letters of various printer's types, or unconnected words. Through the teeming, undistinguishable, many-lingual noise that permeated the Dôme there came clearly and distinctly, "Theo was a pig last night. He made pipi in his bed." A woman painter and her girl friend, in blue tailored suits, bouttonnières in their lapels and upturned feathered hats, their hair cut alike, both looking alike, except that the woman was bony and old and her girl was beautiful and slim, sat with their eyes fixed on the wall above the crowd. Across from them a young man stared at the girl, tried by sheer concentration to move her eyes on him, succeeded finally and found that her gaze was unseeing, as if asleep-eyes-open, as if through film. An American with bleached blond hair cut the atmosphere with his proudly aquiline profile. Others exhibited a fantastically figured scarf, or a monocle held in a disdainful face. Some appeared day after day, at the same table and with the same companions, arranged themselves in their chairs, César brought them beer or coffee, and they sat, finding neither pleasure in talking among themselves nor in looking around them. Some of them had piled on the table that-day-received home newspapers which they did not tear open, or held cigarettes in their mouth which they did not light. Nor did they seem lost in thought, but rather inert, at the Dôme as they might be walking in the street or asleep in bed. The foreign correspondents, French newspaper men, art and literary critics, aesthetes, painters, sculptors, composers, writers of novels, short stories and historical essays,

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politicians and would-be statesmen, conspirators and plotters, spies and adventurers, and the neophytes and students of these pursuits and arts, and their counterparts in lies, charlatans, petty and elaborate crooks, remittance men, hangers-on, parasites, male, female, homosexual, those still in school and those already retired, together with the idlers, lookers-on and tourists, all together with their wives, lovers, mistresses and whores, congregated here and drank sherry, port, madeira, dry and sweet vermouth, sparkling wine, brandy straight and with water, coffee with hot milk and without it, beer light and dark, mineral water. They chatted, gossiped, argued and discussed, or silently waited, looked around at the door or stared at the crowd, or were stared at by it. They thought of dinner at Foyot's restaurant near the Senate building, to begin with grey caviar or belon oysters, with natural still champagne. Or they wondered whether to eat their radishes and veal cutlets at Baty's on the corner, where tablecloths were not clean, or whether to go further up the boulevard to where the tableclothes were cleaner. Some decided that if their friend didn't appear the six francs still in their pocket would buy them a horsemeat steak and four cigarettes in the near-by dairy. Some still stiffly sat, that morning's empty glass eternally before them. They went off with the friend who had arrived, their places quickly taken, returned an hour later filled with meat and wine, eyes shining-dull, looking around the Dôme for vacated chairs, sank in them, waited for the friend to order filtered coffee. Imperceptibly the evening at the Dôme began. The whores who had managed a dinner invitation had taken stock of their new conquests, had decided whether upon return to the Dôme they would excuse themselves to run down to the ladies' room, to reappear as strangers, their faces only a short time before so interested now unrecognizably blank, to saunter past the abandoned dinner partner to a single vacant chair, or whether to spend this part of the evening laughing and talking with him, or to listen soberly to the story of his troubles and his life, or if he had struck a tender cord in them to begin to tell him their story. Now in the mellow off-guard after-dinner time was

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the moment to ask for the favor, try to borrow the money, begin to whisper insinuatingly, with a growing intensity. Now faces were watched for expressions as they listened, as the lips moved, as the heart rose, as the urge grew greater. The smallest, the slightest nod would lighten everything. The heart would grow easier, the lowering atmosphere of the Dôme would become intimate, easily the words would come, "César, a brandy." But if the attentive brows of the face so near would fold closer, and after an instant of unbelievable waiting, the head would start not nodding but negatively shaking from side to side... There lay a pit and a darkness. It was impossible, unthinkable. One's tightness could not become tighter, nor one's heart a heavier ball, with hopelessness more hopeless still, with no balm possible, with no money even to escape in a drink. The murmur of the lips became more persuasive, the eyes watched desperately, darting from brow to lips, to the coming movement of the head for indication of the forming decision within. There was a fear in the Dôme of failure, loneliness, of the coming night, of the threatening tomorrow. What if no man could be attracted? what if the door would be locked? what if the letter didn't come? or if it came, the answer would be a No? How long could one continue searching, waiting, with turbulence inside, and nervousness shaking the fingers, and an indifferent objective world without? The Dôme was full of troubles, each one's seeming the worst possible, least capable of any possible solution. This young American, the most promising of an outstanding class at a famous university, with the appearance of whose first book American letters were pronounced to have reached self-sufficient stature, and whose second book so eagerly awaited had been announced for publication at a date postponed again and again, sat bent over his thirtieth glass of sherry that day. The palm of his hand shielded the sight of it from him, as if he didn't want to realize that he had been trying to stay in his room that day and the preceding days and weeks and months, so that he could try to think and try to get to work, but was being constantly driven by a void, an urge, a thirst, a call-it-what-you-

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will, to the point where now waking in the morning he could not even open his eyes until he crawled out of bed and somehow dressed—a desperate superstition prevented him from keeping a bottle in the same room with the typewriter—so that he could feel his way down the stairs and outside and to the Dôme for his first looking-at-the-world drink of sherry that day. This Danish couple, Paris correspondents for a Copenhagen paper, who for the past forty years had sat so across from each other and watched the other's beloved face, had now come upon their periodic crisis, wracking their heads for the subject of their weekly Paris letter, he thinking that she looked much too shabby to cover the fashion openings, and she waiting for the frightened look of his eyes distended with the coming of his evening migraine headache. At this loose hour, the evening beginning to swing toward the long day's end, terrible decisions were made, and inevitable ones postponed. Conversations were started, assertions made, taken up, agreed to with reservations or quietly denied, or jumped on, contradicted with vehemence and fire, with a banging of the fist that shook the saucers on the table, that made neighbors turn around and stare. The mild haze that had begun to envelop and calm the screaming mind with the first drink before dinner, had filled and thickened through the wines and food, and now with the warming sips of brandy had permeated the mind with a beatific fog. A party had started, friends long separated, now pounding each other's back, were together again. "Cognac?" "Whiskey" "No, let's have champagne." "Let's have a magnum." From behind the intervening wall in the center, from two levels away, the manager, who did not speak a word of the language spoken, had already heard. He took a large shining metal bucket off the shelf near where his wife sat—who had already written down an imposing figure in the ledger sheet under César's name—handed it to the bar man back of the counter who was breaking up pieces of ice, while another bar man lifted the trapdoor in the floor to disappear and reappear with the enormous bottle to be set carefully in the bucket and surrounded with ice half-filled with water, the manager gave the

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neck of the bottle a preliminary twirl, and it was borne away, head covered with a napkin, and held high so that it could be seen by everybody, so that everybody could anticipate, while the bottle was cooling, the celebrating pop. Other parties were making up, to shock with their casual dress and language the diplomatic set dancing decorously across the river at My Sister's Garden, to mix with the house girls and the tourists in the great dives of the rue Fontaine, to listen to Bricktop sing American songs, to look at bare flesh whining and importuning in the brothels of the rue Bondel. Their places were taken by those from the other side of the river who came to see the artists. At one table, where the drinking had begun before dinner and dinner itself had been missed, the saucers had been rising higher and higher, had become four, then five, then six stacks, and César had been forced to bring another table for nothing but the saucers, and the drinkers were self-consciously glancing from time to time at the proof of their prowess on the other table, and wanted to raise their eyes to the other people in the café, to see the effect on them, and half did not dare to and half did not deign to, and they turned a vacuous drunken grin on their faces, and called for César to bring them more drinks. While the starving ones still starved and the snobbish ones still showed their profiles, acting as if they were where they did not want to be, and the arguments continued, and the love-making and love-catching went on, both spurious and real. It was ten o'clock, eleven o'clock, eleven-thirty, time to go to bed, to be ready to wake up with a clear head tomorrow. Between a table of drinkers at which a loud argument was going on and a table of tourists who were staring open-mouthed at them, at a little round table, with only a cigarette-littered saucer from a glass of beer, his arms folded on the table, his head on his arms, a man raucously snored. César shook him, but succeeded only in changing the tone of the snore. A gap of empty chairs showed itself now at the Dôme. For the last time the lonely derelicts found themselves alone at the tables. They stayed in their spots for another moment, as if unable to unhinge themselves, then began to add up the

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coppers and the nickels, blanching at the thought that they might be short. Once again César passed them, bearing for somebody's supper the dish the kitchen served at all hours, garnished sauerkraut, or a deep dish of mussels cooked in their own juice. The manager was ready to go home, waited for his wife to turn the ledger over to one of the bar-men. César leaned on one of the empty tables to take the weight off his feet; he was sorry this was his day of late shift, he was carefully watching the colossal party with the extra table for nothing but saucers. The counter was crowded again with railroad men, taxi chauffeurs, neighborhood concierges in for nightcap, street whores off the sidewalk for a moment. The café part appeared stale and gloomy. The members of the fabulous party seemed to have lost heart; when one of them suggested snails on the rue de la Gaité, none agreed. They were only held together by the legend each one of them was tiredly making up, of the number of individual drinks, incredible total number of saucers, unheard of amount of francs. Each one was also counting the amount of actual francs he had in his pocket to help in the settlement, and was considering the resultant other pressing settlements postponed. After all, one had to leave, move through the dark streets, stand waiting at the locked door for the opening buzz, begin climbing up stairs that were lighted up for exactly one minute. Why didn't one leave? Cesar shuffled to the innermost empty part of the café and began piling chairs up on the tables, exposing a floor littered with torn paper, cigarette butts, burnt matchsticks, breadcrumbs under a place where somebody had eaten. As the time to close up approached, César left half-awake islands of the people who remained. They watched him, thinking, "Just another drink, another moment." He was coming nearer and nearer to them, making their island smaller and smaller. Soon he would snatch the glasses from their table, stack up the saucers and wipe up underneath, and not lay down the saucers again, but hold them and wait, angry and mumbling. The Dôme used to close at two o'clock.

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## ELEGY FOR A DIVER

Hawk free of jess,
the diver springs
toward fire no son can bear,
arcs instantly,
and forms his highdive fall
against the incandescent air
still stressed with his lost wings.

His nerve-ends guess
brave distances
of space, but his sunstruck
timing fails:
he overreaches, swans,
and bellyflops in luck
gone bad in all grave instances.

New Aegeans press
their welcome over him:
his deepening flight
downs him
in green spectra where the sun
is drowned; phosphoresence lights
the treasure of his oceanic whim,

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but in a wilderness
of eelgrass, kelp,
and shell, his breath is spent
imagining
that lanternfish are stars.
Unfound in this third element,
he fathoms down beyond all help

while every Daedalus
schemes on to soar.
Where discovery is to drown
he sounds
the whaling sea—this son
with sculpin, coin, and bone,
become the dark he must explore.

—Philip Booth

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# MOTHER NATURE

"IT'S only a lizard," he muttered to himself desperately, "only a lizard." The quick rhythm of the phrase only served to accentuate the beat of his heart and drive him further on. He walked a long way from the olive-grove, stumbling against roots, giving sudden nervous leaps. Finally he climbed up a tree, tame and safe as it was, and rested there with closed eyes till the pain of fear had died away from his chest. He clung to the tree, wanting to remain in it all day and not tread the dangerous earth again.

He had come to this place, some months ago, with great hopes. After the persecution of the city-demons, it had opened before him like one of those unexpected streets, broad and quiet, where there is a clinic and a blue cross and no noise is allowed; a place to lie down, or simply stand still.

He had pictured his arrival in detail: as soon as he left the houses behind him, there would be an instantaneous change, like entering water, a new element. There he would find grass, miles and miles of it. He would lie in it, rise and stretch out further on, without stop or choice, for the grass would be the same everywhere. The earth would be smooth and brown and smell of potatoes. There would be a few white stones to play about with. And by the sea, a small pool of water, green, blue, yellow, making liquid circles around him; at the bottom a stretch of pale sand for his bare feet. Then back to the bare expanse of grass and light, the sunny platform where he would lie for hours on end, no threat behind him, only his light indolent shadow at his side, waiting without haste for the next unimportant move. That was nature; that immobility and that uniformity.



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Nobody contradicted; they all agreed nature was an ideal place. Once he had a sudden pang of anxiety and asked them suspiciously why they didn't go too, if that was the case; they replied that they could not bear the solitude, and the answer put him to rest; he took it for granted that they were different. In a little fit of boldness he asserted that he did not agree, that on the contrary he desired solitude. For a moment he remembered another solitude, in his city room at night, hooded by stirring curtain, gaping with dark doorway; the extreme solitude of waking from a dream at dawn, knowing that no housekeeper would bring breakfast in the morning.

But that could not be the solitude they meant when they spoke of the country; solitude only grew in houses, among the indifferent walls of the city. In the country, houses lost their power, and night was natural, complete with moon and stars, not a blackness staring in at the window.

He set off then, bracing himself for the sudden immersion in that other element. He obstinately refused to look around until he had reached his destination, until he came out for the first time on the threshold of his new house, the plain before him, the journey finished. Then his eyes travelled around slowly. It was much larger than he had expected; the spreading plain, the high hills. Between two hills, the distant sea; a difficult, dangerous expedition. How did one get to it, through what unknown passages? He felt a sudden weakness in his knees, and sat down on the stone steps, looking undecidedly from plain to hill, from hill to sea, not knowing where to go, what to do with all this. The colors too were different; large patches of brown and grey, black spikes of trees and rocks; the colors he had imagined, blue, green, yellow, were narrow isolated spots without importance here; the dominant impression was brown austerity, dry, rugged brownness. He faced the land timorously, suspecting that it had no intention of softening into an idyllic couch for an idle body, but would accept only the heavy stamp of conqueror's foot.

Then, as he leaned back feebly for a moment's respite, he

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became aware of the silence for the first time. Without moving, his eyes half-shut, he began exploring it tentatively, as he had done with land a few minutes before. He crossed the outward, neutral zone of absolute silence, and entered the inner core of it, where were generated all the vibrations that composed it. First there was a rustle, which travelled fast from one end of the plain to the other, following capricious, circular itineraries. Then suspended above the long, mysterious rustling, he caught another layer of sound; a large monotonous chorus, punctuated at intervals by a solitary, strident cry. He listened more intently, with a touch of alarm. Those were the cicadas, the old woman said, who sang in the heat all through the summer. She fetched him an empty husk left by a cicada on a tree in the garden; there he could see their shape perfectly, she said, that was what cicadas were like. He took it in the palm of his hand, hesitatingly, and examined it. It was shiny and transparent, ornamented with small legs and wings and horns, an incongruous monster in miniature. He threw it away with vague distaste and went up to the tree, searched the branches carefully to discover the innumerable cicadas singing in it. He had expected to find the tree crawling with them; but the branches were completely bare. So, he said, that's how it is; they are invisible and omnipresent; they possess all the trees and stray grasses of this vast stretch of land, but one can't see them or do anything against them. He turned round then, because there was that rustle again, in the laurel-bush this time, among those dead leaves; nearer still; and there was that stone from the wall that fell by his side without having been touched. And somewhere behind the hedge a small scraping sound, and in the distance a continuous thud down by the road; the screech of a bird lost in the thick blue sky, and finally rising to a climax, one exasperated cicada sent its high, piercing note above the muted drone of the chorus. He stood absolutely still, as if, having touched the heart of silence, he had released some sort of bell-mechanism, a burglar alarm that beat madly against his temples. So, he said again, dazed, that's how it is. No emptiness here, no

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sunny vacancy of a clean-swept house to receive him, but a densely inhabited world, fully alive. "Nature is inhabited, nature is alive," he muttered, "what am I to do?"

Compared to this, the landscape of his expectations grew pale and inanimate. He forgot it so quickly that he felt no disappointment, only a grim excitement in answer to a challenge; the tenderness he had brought as a gift to his legendary green mother-nature turned to hard admiration, the deep dark feeling, like a passion, which one has for an opponent of great class.

The first expedition was the hills; the sea he left for later on, for the period of completed intimacy, when he would have the right to descend to the shore and rest, having conquered the dark land behind.

The day was cloudy and warm; there was a hooded silence, with sudden fitful awakenings. He walked confidently in the silence, believing it to be peace. For some time he travelled along level ground, where progress was easy. His first temerity was to leave the path and set out at random, across stone and gorse, guided only by the invisible direction that pointed insistently upwards to the hills.

The cicadas had not been heard that day. In this weather the land became a purely vegetal world; animals were absent from it; the foliage was a positive shineless green, the thorny shrubs clearly defined, unbleached by sunlight; there were no mutations of color and light, no vivid sky to interfere with the shape of the trees; the air was neutral. Around the large round stones grew small, distinct flowers, pale violet; they were motionless, and the stones studded securely in the damp earth.

The land began to slope upwards, and he followed it slowly. It was not a day for exultant racing, assaults against the sun; because of the low white sky, one preferably looked down to the ground and followed one's way patiently, picking up the earth's details. But in spite of this slow, moderate way of advancing, he soon found the climbing increasingly difficult. He paused to rest; but the moment he halted, he began slipping backwards, for the stones had become mobile owing

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to the slope and rolled furtively beneath him. He was taken by a sudden senseless fear of losing ground irreparably, and set off again in haste. He advanced painfully, bent low over the slope. A stifling, vapourous heat pressed against his body; he realised the air was not with him; it had emerged from its false neutrality and massed itself into invisible opposition. He began to sweat. The moment he found a firmer foothold, he looked up, and saw that the hill with its crown of trees had loomed unexpectedly near; the way a statue, appearing in the distance impersonal and indifferent, suddenly fixes its blank eyes with startling directness on the approaching traveller. As he stood measuring the width of the belt that still separated him from the summit, the silence was broken by a loud rustle in a bush in front of him; it could only have been produced by a large body, and a violent movement. He threw himself forward again, clutching some plants for balance, his limbs rapidly dissolving; in the unreality of a dream he saw a red hare spring out of the bush and disappear bouncing in the direction of the trees. It took him some time to recover; the sight of the harmless hare had brought no relief; he could not associate it with the rustle and the annihilating fear that had followed it; the hare brought no memories of gay hunting expeditions, horses and hounds and pageantry, no reassuring echo of the world of men. There was that hidden rustle only, the fitful awakening in the silence, not human. A snake, he thought suddenly, as if he hadn't seen the hare at all and had at last discovered the real cause of the rustle. He leapt forward frantically, and fixed his eyes on the spiked summit, as if appealing to it, clinging to it from downwards. Then it seemed as if the hill began sinking upon itself in a ponderous heap, that slid towards him and pressed him back. "The mountain doesn't want me," he thought with dread, heaving the falling weight before him as he advanced.

When he reached the first tree, he leaned back against the trunk and let all effort slip from his arms; his head rolled back, a branch brushed against his forehead. At the same moment, a large black bird, a raven, left the branch and

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flew away with a cry, its stiff wings heavily creaking. It diminished quickly in the sky until it was reduced to the shape birds are expected to have. Birds should only be seen in the sky, quick and small; never so near. He waited by the tree to see whether it would come back, this time growing from smaller to larger, until it swooped against his breast and knocked him down with its creaking wings. In his mind half-forgotten information affirmed that ravens only went for dead men, but he couldn't help feeling that he had flesh available for them, all his flesh. No defence was possible; he walked deeper into the trees, keeping it ready for them at any moment. They continued to circle above his head, cawing steadily, making oblique descents. "I shall get used to them," he thought, "I shall get used to everything, in time." As he watched them closely, gliding back and forth from the surrounding hills, his eyes were soon caught in an unbreakable rhythm, a rhythm running parallel to the rising and falling lines of the hills. Suddenly the scenery was fully disclosed to him. His glance, now alive, dipped down until it met the narrow ravine, which formed a sharp angle breaking the steep line of the slope to send it shooting up again for the abrupt erection of the next hill. His eye participated directly, actively in the architecture, built the landscape into consistent shape as it advanced. It was his first moment, very brief, of initiation; the core of the mind, suddenly touched, communicated without thought. He was contained there, he coated the walls of the hills, welded them together with his own substance.

He stepped forward, and sat down on the edge of the rock, wedged himself securely into a position of permanence. The rock was shaped like a throne; before leaning back against it, an old habit made him glance at it, as one instinctively makes sure, before sitting down, that one's chair is in the right place. He saw a long sinuous crack running along the rock; dry blades of grass sprouted from it. He peered into it, but could see nothing. A stick, he thought, would help to measure the depth. But he did not use it. The creatures that inhabited the crack must not be disturbed on any

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account. He leaned back carefully, keeping his back, his hands well away from the crack. Then he waited. He listened, without looking, for some sound that would tell him that the creatures had begun creeping out of the crack. He changed place several times, for he felt the imprints of more cracks behind him, burning his back in streaks. Suddenly, his vacant, obsessed eyes happened to get hooked on a detail of the landscape; a flicker of recognition awoke in them then; he vaguely remembered a conversation having been interrupted. Once more he followed the lines of the hills in dutiful repetition. He tried to finish the landscape; but it had lost its shape; the work was undone. He felt free to leave the rock then. He walked away with a deep but joyless relief.

He meandered from tree to tree, dragging his feet, secretly hoping to return home soon. His recent humiliation had placed a stubborn rancour in him, a hard growth that would not give in, that kept him separate from the trees. He became possessed by that noisy pathetic pride of persons who are not wanted; he turned back ostentatiously to the world of men, where he belonged. "My friends, my numerous friends," he flung out incoherently, "the brilliant reunions among which I figured! The exquisite intricacies of the social game (he glanced with contempt at the monotonous trees and the simple pleasures hanging from their branches). And then I saw someone I knew; I went up to her and said— (effort was no longer necessary, he was drawn into a kind of reality with a flux of its own, where he could not choose some incidents and eliminate others) and said to this handsome woman: ah, how fortunate to find you here! She opened her dark lips to let out cigarette-smoke, and this I took for a smile; perhaps it was a smile, for she had excellent manners; yet somehow she was insolent as well. She did not recognise me."

He put up a hand and leaned against a tree, bowing his head disconsolately. The story went on; he listened, growing red. "I didn't let her go away. She couldn't go away without recognising me. I insisted, quite tactfully, I believe. This oversight had to be repaired. But she was insolent; she

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would not remember me." In the heat of shame the vision ceased to be quite exact, the characters accelerated their movements. He saw himself drawing closer to the woman and pounding his fist rapidly, rhythmically on his other hand, insisting. Then the woman turned away, and he followed her stiffly, quickly, as if wound by clockwork. Then he lost sight of her. But he still persisted in the chase, full of shame but utterly helpless. He was shown the Exit with a smile, but was unable to disappear. In a dead, desperate voice he asked whether anyone had seen her, stating her name clearly; for if he did not find her he would remain chained to his humiliation forever; she alone could release him. He covered his face, wanting to disappear, to escape into the country, where he would be alone and respected.

Opening his eyes, he felt no shock on finding the wish come true; he saw no miracle in it. He knew there was a catch somewhere, and that was not miraculous, only in the nature of things. He looked at the forest distrustfully; there had to be a fissure, a flaw in the perfect metamorphosis; these trees had to have some double meaning. They looked straightforward enough, growing simply from earth to sky. On closer inspection however one could not tell whether they were friends or enemies; standing motionless in the semi-obscurity, they formed a silhouette similar to that of the stranger who knocked at the front door a little before nightfall, and took some time to say what he wanted. The suspense had been unbearable. He cut it short by turning his face away from the trees, obliterating the scene, then blotting out thought altogether. But in the vacancy fear settled in all the more easily. He recognised it immediately this time, wearily, sickly, and did nothing to stop it, but fled. He leapt forward through the trees, but the leap was suspended halfway, his feet caught in a tangle of low, prickly creepers; they covered the ground everywhere; there were no paths. Further down, it became even more difficult, because the trees grew smaller and thicker, the branches lower, so that he could not pass beneath them. But he paid no real notice; he only knew he must go downwards, downwards at any cost,

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until he reached the plain. He tried to extricate himself, stood up for a moment unsteadily, then fell again to the ground, where his hands were stung; he brought his face very close to the earth and peered through the brambles. In one glance he saw such an incredible movement of unsuspected existences, small feet, trailing tails, antennae, that he scrambled to his feet in horror and started running again, before creatures descended from the trees as well, sucked at his nape, gripped his shoulder from above. He plunged ahead, thrown from one deadlock of trees to another, yet never daring to touch the tree-trunks for even a momentary support, his hands clapped to his ears to keep out the sound of awakening, the sound of pursuit. In his flight he picked up a large stone, the ancient gesture of defence of children and primitive men, and held it tight, clung to its hardness all the way back to the plain; when he reached the house he opened his fist and saw it, the stone of fear, and dropped it furtively in a corner of the garden. From the gate he caught sight of the old woman standing in the front window, stooping over the lamp; his eyes lit up extraordinarily and he ran forward to her, pushing the door open brutally.

He drew up a stool near the table, and watched the preparations for supper. His eyes rested on her warmly. He wished he could talk to her without the difficulties of his usual timidity. Fortunately she did not like silence in a house, and spoke first without delay. She asked him where he had been and what he had done all day. At first her questions made him draw back; they offended him, brought back shame, so that his answers were brief and gruff. But when she asked him, frankly wondering, how it could be that he was not afraid to be all alone on the wild hills, he gave way happily, and confided to her tenderly that the trees were indeed very frightening.

This domestic warmth soon encouraged him completely, and the next moment he begged the old woman impulsively not to go back to the village that night but stay and sleep in the house. She asked him why, but he would not answer, only smiled, saying that she must stay. Suddenly he stood

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up as he had found an irrefutable argument: "Look, you have to stay because you can't possibly go back to the village in the dark at this hour. Don't you see? Now you have to stay."

"Yes, it's very dark, I know," she said doubtfully, "but we have no robbers in the district; that is well-known."

"Robbers!" he looked at her contemptuously, laughed. "Aren't you afraid of robbers?" she asked. "No," he said and laughed again, sourly, sarcastically. The old woman was tired; she shrugged helplessly and said she would stay.

He left her then, and went to bed, exulting. He did not care about shame, he did not care about power; it was enough that she would stay. He went all tender again, full of a child's gratitude for the protection of the night-lamp. But it did not prevent him from hearing the sad, anxious grown-man's voice in him saying that he was losing, that the battle was going badly. Yet he went to sleep still parleying with hopes, refusing to accept the day's results as final.

For his second expedition he chose the sea, thinking it would be easier than the hills; after his first failure, he did not want to be presumptuous and set too difficult tasks for himself.

From his house he could distinguish the path that led to the sea. At a certain point it disappeared among a tumble of rocks, gorges, and dark passages. He took a step backwards, his purpose faltering. He did not know the way; the land was unknown, forbidding. But on the other side of it lay the beach, clean, tame, flat, a rare privilege. He strained towards it, hating the misgivings that held him back. Looking ahead with dread, he had the presentiment of a permanent prohibition being placed upon him, a deep, irreparable negativeness that condemned him to an eternal stay-at-home and kept all the beauty of the world out of his path. Piteously he begged not to be excluded yet.

But once he set off, the way became indeed so difficult that he had no leisure for fear, and developed instead a kind of practical strategic sense, an alertness, a wariness as to which way was the surest, the shortest, which stone would support

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his foot best; every step was a small achievement; feet and hands were busy, his mind guiding them intelligently. He reached the sea far sooner than he had expected. There was still a large amount of unspent energy in him, unawakened appetite for action, so that he found the beach dull at first, and sank in the soft thick sand without pleasure. Although calm, the sea was not very clear; an opaque greengage color. He lay back and closed his eyes; they were tired by the light, which was too white. For a while he thought it was this strain that momentarily obscured his vision and made the beach appear sunless, bathed in a faint grey lividness. But when he opened his eyes the impression remained, and he noticed that the sky was thinly veiled all over. Under the muffled light, the sand became white ashes; it held no warmth. He gathered his knees close to him and huddled up in his small basin of sand. The sand slipped delicately beneath him, a minute leaking that could not be stopped. After a few moments, his body grew stiff and cautious; he dared not breathe for fear of disturbing the sand. The position soon became unbearable. He let out a half-strangled cry of anger and got up. He knew he had to start off again. He walked off along the beach; his feet sank, had to be lifted at every step with an effort; while behind, the sand closed over his footmarks, crumbling discreetly.

At the other end of the beach, the sea became a purple blue; the waters were deeper, rocks stood out of them. There was a difference in the air as well; it was saltier, harsher. It was the real, the dangerous sea, the sea of tough men in boats, not of holiday-makers. He advanced slowly, and soon got lost in a strange sea-fantasmagory.

It began to unfold when he climbed the first low rock overlooking the water. There he saw the rock continue under the shallow sea, flatten out like a basin; it was covered with holes and clusters of sea-plants. He stooped lower, following the rock with his eyes in its gradual slope. He stepped forward unconsciously—his foot touched water. He looked up and saw he was surrounded by water; so he took off his clothes and threw them on the dry rock behind; then

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turned back intently to the submerged rock. His face touched the surface, and his eyes became blurred with water. But he did not lose sight of the submarine landscape; it continued uninterrupted, only in larger dimensions; the clusters of plants became dense forests, red and brown; they undulated softly like hair, but when he tried to pluck some out they cut his fingers like sharp thread. The rock-holes also grew larger; they were pools, deep wells with more holes branching off in their inner walls; the water whirled in them silently, without foam. He put his hand in one of them and felt the circular power of the water; at the same time he thought: "it is deep enough, the animals must begin now!" He withdrew his hand. A crab scrambled out of the hole and disappeared in the thick carpet of sea-weed, followed by another larger one, horny and spotted. He did not move, but watched attentively. At the very bottom of the hole he managed to immobilize the waters and locate the gleam of a coiled tentacle. "Octopus, octopus," he pronounced in a solemn chanting tone. (In the big cave by the ocean Gilliatt the hero fought all night with the Octopus, until the eight tentacles dropped dead and there remained a red hole in Gilliatt's breast.) Down in the hole gleamed the tentacle, swollen with strength, strangling animals in silence. In the next hole, the deeper one, there would lie a larger octopus, and a larger one in the hole after it, and so on until the sea reached its deepest point, and then they would all reach their full-size, and master the ocean. He took one more stiff step forward, searching for the deeper hole, the greater horror. But instead of the octopus a jelly-fish came floating up to the surface of the well; transparent at first, it turned to a lilac form, that wavered, melted, fluctuated about him, gathered its soft body over its cluster of thin prickly legs, then expanded and moved on. He picked up a pebble and dropped it with precision right above it; the pebble slipped through the transparent substance and fell at the bottom of the sea; the jelly-fish floated on unbroken. He threw more stones, searching stubbornly for a point to strike, unable to believe in its invulnerability. Then he lost sight of it; the pale lilac dissolved in the deeper purple

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of the sea, like a distant figure stepping back among a thickness of curtains. Its reappearance would be as sudden; the deep water growing pale at one point, the paleness moving forward, that would be the jelly-fish come back. A slimy caress, a quick, mysterious scratch leaving a trace of lilac venom. What would be the motives of the attack? One could not know; the sea was a free region, where action was arbitrary; the jellyfish and crab were at large, travelled according to their will. He had no rights upon them, no knowledge. He moved instinctively away from the open crossways, and drew near the solid barrier of rocks. There was a rock larger than the others which cut into the water vertically, and held the bottom of the sea securely with its large stone root. His eyes travelled slowly down its bare surface, yellow above water, livid green below the wet line, then darkening, broadening under the sea, till it got lost in purple shadows, in sunken caves and vegetation. It was an excellent spot for exploration: to dive straight along the rock to its root, and having parted the curtain of vegetation, touch the place where the vertical line broke on the horizontal of the seafloor. For a brief moment he had a notion of what it would be, this renouncement of the dry daylight, and the rapid descent and free circulation in the blue regions under sea. Absolute renouncement it had to be, in one moment, after which one would be released and swim in the fishes' manner. He did not move, only looked at the place where the rock ceased to be visible, and felt the moment would never come. He insisted feebly, using prosaic arguments because they are usually more persuasive: he was not wearing clothes; his body was naked, free to plunge deep under; nothing would deteriorate, he had only his skin and his hair, which the water could not harm. But in spite of this invulnerability, this perfect freedom, he could not give himself up. The refusal, the persistent negation drove him to exasperation; he looked down at his motionless body with hatred; and suddenly he saw that it was petrified, stained all over with blue marks of cold. It was like a disease; horror came scuttling to him and struck his flesh with quick

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successive shocks. In an instant he was decomposed. He was driven forwards and thrown on the sand like a sack. He fell on it face downwards soaked and exhausted, and lay there for some time, thinking that the heaviness of the water would never leave him. He thought of the pagan poet who swam far out at sea, where the ships pass, and played with the dolphins. His face hardened, not with envy, but with desperate contempt. "They don't know," he said, "it's all lies. One doesn't play with dolphins. They are not harmless as one is led to believe. They bite, they all bite; I know."

He trudged back to the shore; the sky was still veiled, making the scene desolate. In his loneliness he peopled the shore with a colony of holiday-makers, and arranged them on the sloping sands like a boy playing with tin-soldiers. There they were in his imagination, under parasols, on towels, eating sandwiches or playing with a ball. The holiday-makers! he had brought them here, he could not do without them. But it was like bringing them for someone else's benefit; he himself could not profit by it, could not take a share of companionship. He did not join them, but walked among them carefully, avoiding the white towels like traps. They were there; that was enough. He did not regret having brought them. But as he trod the dreary, crowded beach, he found that the refuge he had built for himself was safe, and sad as a prison; fear was driven out, but the beach was irreparably wrecked, its frightening glamor all gone.

There were these failures then, recurring monotonously, yet never quite final. In spite of them he remained at his post. It was really one long enduring victory, without brilliance. He did not conquer the right to stay, but by small patient works, painfully gained tolerance, temporary admission. But it could not go on much longer; one more trial was needed, then the victory would give way, turn to undisguised defeat.

In the evenings he sat as usual with the old woman in silence, looking out of the window most of the time. Obscurely, he felt his lease was nearly up; he could do nothing to postpone or bring it nearer; he could only move towards it

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with the days. Sometimes he became impatient, and suddenly wished he could have his trial soon and have done. The intensity of this wish gave him an illusion of courage, vitality; he took the stirrings of a purely apprehensive restlessness for rising confidence, wild dawning hope. Then the house would appear empty, over-familiar, inanimate, the hours slow, and the presence of the old woman without any effect or significance. One night he felt a touch of boredom, for the first time, and suddenly wished to be out in the dark.

He got up quickly, an unexpected streak of exultance shooting up in him. He thought a voice was calling to him from outside, and whipped up an ecstatic response, which stepped over itself into higher and higher degrees of intensity, till he tipped over the peak into a headlong race towards the long desired union. "Goodbye, goodbye," he cried to the woman, "I'll be out all night, don't wait." "Where are you going?" she asked, startled, but he was already off, so that her last syllables echoed distantly behind him.

He sped along the road in the bright moonlit night; the forest was massed darkly ahead of him. He burst into it and threw himself panting against one of the trees. His heart beat hard after the long run. Unconsciously, out of habit, he mistook it for the other heart, beating not with exertion but fear. He quickly corrected the mistake, and reminded himself that there could be no fear tonight, because he had been called. He rested back, sobered, listening to his heart, waiting for the beats to die down. Above him, the moon travelled past a tree and made its full appearance. Then it stood still, as if it had found what it wanted, and stared down at him. What absurdly human motives one gives to the moon, he thought, bringing back to mind the reasonable laws of gravitation. He plunged deeper in the wood to avoid the moon, find a rounded darkness in which he would curl up like a foetus in a womb. Further on the moon was hidden, but its light trickled through and made moving patterns on the ground. At one spot, the light fell through a hole in a tree, making a large area of whiteness round its root. A cluster of wild ivy grew there; the leaves were large

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and smooth, so that the light shone on them brightly, placing one round white eye on each leaf. "This is certainly not what one calls, 'a beautiful effect of the moon'," he observed, "these leaves are like scales, like a reptile's skin." The transformation would be easy; the leaves linked together like an armor, gathering themselves into the form of a large reptile rattling its loose scales as it came to life. Even after he had moved further on, his ear strained back absent-mindedly for the rattle of the reptile with its hanging metallic coat. "It won't follow," he said distantly, "it is night, and they are all asleep." His steps became cautious as in a huge dormitory; strict limits set in around him, here I must not tread, there I must not stop. He tried to touch things as little as possible, to withdraw from contacts. But his body had to occupy some space, however small; yet that narrow, narrow territory allowed to him seemed to melt beneath him like ice, leaving him standing on one foot, suspended, utterly unsupported. The only way to retain balance was to walk quickly, lightly. Quickly, quickly now, patter away, and in his preoccupation he collided into a tree. The shaking awakened a bird that scrambled from its branches in haste. Then he heard it knocking loudly among the other trees. "It's not a bird," he said straightening up alertly, "but a bat; it's the blind bat; not a bird, because it never sings, and has loose skins instead of feathers; its clutches are uncommonly powerful." Then suddenly he took off his jacket and threw it over his head. The gesture surprised and embarrassed him. At the same time he wondered where he had heard it said that bats clutch people by the hair and never let go. Even the jacket was a poor protection; underneath it every hair became as sensitive as a nerve, the skin of his skull crept. The blind bird was still around, knocking clumsily against branches; he tried to make out whether it had come any nearer. His listening was suddenly interrupted by the cry of a jackdaw, a terrible piercing sound, as if the bird had woken up to find itself encoiled by a serpent. Incredible happenings went on up there, in the dark tree; strange cruel murder of animals, strange dying of animals; pain of birds, smell of soaked feath-

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ers, cold dark blood of snake. Horror threw him far from the tree before the drop of black blood fell on his hand; he was pushed out once more into the open. He looked around at a loss, nailed to the naked spot. "They are everywhere, the place is full of them, the dear creatures of God," he said wearily, without sarcasm. Far away at the end of the forest there was a field lying open to the sky, washed by the cool moon; it glimmered like a sea. He fixed his eyes on it, this time renouncing it from the first, without hope of ever reaching it. There was the interminable forest in between, the path obstructed by untouchable trees; and fear, always moving before him, like a shield. "I was made for this life," he said, "I was born for it." Having made this assertion, he looked around questioningly. The trees were dark and still; the birds slept, woke, cried, indifferently; the silver field was distant, entirely given up to the moon. The assertion had not been accepted. He would have to go away soon. "I want to stay," he said in a low voice. "This is the life for me; there's no other."

The forest was wide awake now; owl answered owl, acorns dropped from branches; the trees exchanged their birds continuously, and the gnawing tribe set to work in the hollow trunks. At each touch of wing or leaf, he shivered, then repeated patiently: "Let me stay." Love persisted under fear; love grew humble, humbler at every step of retreat, till it came to kneel, motionless and undesiring, at the feet of an accepted impossibility. Then fear disappeared, as if its mission were now ended. The last trespasser was allowed to leave in peace. He did not look back again, but obediently followed the direction that pointed towards the city, towards a more common fate. The forest grew behind him, amassing forbidden splendor under its high dome expanding with his departure. When he came to the limit where the trees ended, he lifted his hand and unhooded himself. Soon he was back on the road, only a few yards from the house.



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# MUSIC AND DANCE

THE production of *Obéron* which M. Lehmann has just produced at the Opéra must really be considered a first performance. Commissioned by the management of Covent Garden after the great success of *Euryanthe* in Vienna in 1823, *Obéron* was tailored to the requirements, conventions, and machinery of the English opera house, and was undoubtedly far from the real opera that von Weber had in mind. But the composer was ailing—and did the best he could with the imposed limitations and the fragmentary libretto lifted piece-meal from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the old French romance *Huon de Bordeaux*, and Wieland's poem of *Obéron*. Rezia's "Océan" aria, the overture, the barcarolle of the Ondines: these are heard in concert occasionally, but the rest of the opera falls newly on the ear, and M. Lehmann's version is seen to be vastly different from what London saw and heard in 1826.

The interminable and hellishly dull spoken text has been pared to the vanishing point and only a few words retained for the exigencies of plot. Wûlner's recitatives, deservedly, have been retained but the orchestral accompaniment to them lightened up a bit. Lastly, M. Henri Busser, in preparing the score for its Paris presentation, has tactfully and tastefully inserted various selections from von Weber to do service as act-preludes, scene-changes, ballets, processions. In a work already episodic and strong on spectacle, the added *Concertstucke*, *Polonaise Brilliante*, *Variations Brilliantes* and two *Sonates* pass almost unnoticed.

*Obéron* has none of the good-natured naiveté and elegance (nor the balance) of *Les Indes Galantes*, but will serve for its successor at least in box office terms. Too long and too static, one must say, in spite of unfamiliar and luscious pages

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of von Weber (how much Wagner and Bizet, among others, owe this composer and this opera), in spite of the delightful shock of the aerial ballet with nymphs circling on wires as the garlanded body of the sleeping Cavalier is borne up—*whoosh*!—into the flies, in spite of a fine rambunctious tempest and Mme. Araujo's rousing performance of "Ocean, je te maudit!"; in spite of all.

Yet, at the last tableau, one is glad to have sat it all through for here the designer Jean-Denis Malclès, has created what must be the loveliest moment of pure theatre visible today. Curtain-rise discloses a high rocky structure, Oberon and Titania enthroned on top with their attendants lining two winding staircases. Mysterious colored lights, suggesting buried gems, shine through tangled roots, twigs, veined leaves. After the slight notion of plot is wound up, the chorus and ballet burst through a grotto center back, in a series of entries. Attired in elements of leaves and flowers, some as birds, they pass quickly and formally in gradations of color which M. Malclès has arranged in superb and fastidious taste, bringing cries of pleasure from the audience.

Few cries of pleasure have been heard in or around the Opéra-Comique, with its budget cuts, its ballet curtailed, its principal new work poorly received by the public. *Cosi fan tutti* continues to receive an excellent performance in its charming *grisaille* décors, with Margaret Maas and Jacqueline Brumaire especially in full control of airs and graces both musical and dramatic, but for some reason the house is always half-empty. *Carmen* and *Les contes d'Hoffman*, the sell-out items of the repertoire, are performed in a state of tattered scenery and sloppy staging which are unbelievable, but *Pelléas et Mélisande* and Ravel's *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* are presented with great care, The novelty, *The Rake's Progress*, when translated into French as *Le Libertin*, in spite of Wakhévitch décors and first-rank singers, trips constantly over the ponderous libretto and loses what wit the original might possibly have possessed. Being never for an instant rakish, progressive or libertine, it survived few performances in Paris.

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As for young singers of promise, the Conservatoire seems to have an interesting crop of them who are already professional though scarce noted. Look in any international catalogue of recordings for operatic works conducted by René Leibowitz: Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*, for instance. Listen to the cast of youngsters who sing Ravel's *L'heure espagnole* under this conductor, especially a fine bass and a truly delightful soprano who turns up again as one of the three soprani in Leibowitz' recording of Satie's *Socrate*.

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In the world of dance, little, really, has come about. One new ballet, *L'Ange Gris*, that will certainly go into the permanent repertoire, but otherwise one notes only that individual dancers have discovered their personality or perfected their style, that deportment that lifts the soloist from the corps. J.-P. Andréani and Mlle. Claude Bessy of the Opera seem to have found new luster; while Richard Adama of the Marquis de Cuevas Ballet suddenly seems to dominate an ensemble, and dances either *adagio* or *pas de caractère* with ease and precision.

Which brings us to a point. the Marquis! Oh my, how his taste flip-flops between high and low! He gives us in the same evening the tackiest *Marriage of Aurora* ever staged and the sensitive *Ange Gris*. What can one say before the pink and yellow cheesecloth columns and draperies of *Aurora*? The flat lighting? The vaudeville air? Nothing save to remind oneself to stay in the bar the next time it is performed.

But *L'Ange Gris*—another story. This has Debussy's *Suite Bergomasque* for music, and a theme by the Marquis himself. The young painter Sebire provides the setting, the garden of a château in somber greens and earth colors, with a grayish sky and a bench at the back. A woman still young is preparing for her daughter's first ball and dreams of her own first love. Young people come and go, the daughter dances with her fiancé. The woman conjures the ghost of her early love, and in rejecting him finds in his place the Gray

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Angel. That's about it, and one thinks of a dozen other ballets founded on two or three even older ones. But George Skibine has designed a choreography so simple, formal, highly inventive but never obtrusive, bound cleanly to the music, that a quiet and very touching atmosphere is created, that shimmer that marks the memorable ballet.

Serge Golovine, small and quick, dances the fiancé; Kathleen Gorham, an enchanting English newcomer to the company, dances the daughter. They are perfectly paired, and seem to enjoy dancing together. Skibine makes use of those small tingling bursts of energy typical of Debussy to bring the lovers onstage in the *Passepied*, *Minuet*, and *Prelude*; he reserves the familiar *Clair de lune* for the reveries of Marjorie Tallchief in the role of the woman, and between them they make us forget how many times we've heard the piece. Tallchief was never more lovely nor more technically brilliant than now, and one hopes for more new vehicles to show her off.

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But that which is the most Parisian is finally the ineffably fresh and silly intimate musical comedy *Les chansons de Bilitis* over at the Théâtre des Capucines. Set in Greece and Lesbos, it offers many charms: the comedienne Pauline Carton in corkscrew curls as an adamant Athenian matron, a handful of pleasant Joseph Kosma songs, a bevy of ladies dressed in ankle-strap gold sandals and slight wisps of chiffon in assorted colors; who walk very carefully about, roll their eyes, and sometimes even speak a line. Oh, yes, and a bumpkin clown and the prettiest blonde shepherdess ever seen, singing *Revenons vite à nos moutons* in the midst of her stuffed flock. The political allusions are new, but the formula is at least as old as the seventeenth century and is no doubt good for a century or so more.

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THOMAS QUINN CURTISS

# THE PARIS THEATRE

THE Paris theatre has undergone almost a complete change since the beginning of the Second World War. The occupation years, though lean and terrible ones, witnessed the dawn. Henry de Montherlant's *La Reine Morte* was created at the Comedie-Francaise in 1942 and in 1943 Gerard Philippe made his debut in Jean Giraudoux's *Sodome et Gomorrhe* at the Hebertot. Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* was produced the following year, as was Jean-Paul Sartre's first play, *Les Mouches*, while the 1940-45 period saw the staging of Andre Roussin's initial comedies.

The Liberation inaugurated an era of notable achievement. It is impossible to chronicle here all the outstanding events of the French stage during the past decade, but high among them were the Louis Jouvet Molière productions at the Athenée, the formation of the Madeleine Renaud - Jean-Louis Barrault Company, the formation of Jean Vilar's Theatre National Populaire, Pierre-Aime Touchard's reign at the Comédie-Française during which Andre Gide's *Les Caves du Vatican* was staged, Jean Marais' stunning production of *Britannicus* was seen and the plays of Pirandello were rediscovered.

Certainly of no less importance was Marcel Herrand's management of the Mathurins and Andre Barsarq's management of the Atelier, where Anouilh's *Invitation au Chateau* and *Colombe*, and Marcel Ayme's *Tête des Autres* appeared and the emergence of a whole school of talented younger players from Francois Perrier to Daniel Gelin and from Maria

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Cæsares to Danielle Delorme. There was a healthy interest in foreign drama and the plays of Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill, William Saroyan, Jan de Hartog, Ugo Betti, Arthur Miller, T. S. Eliot and Sean O'Casey were introduced and, perhaps most encouraging and significant of all, this new theatre drew into its service such distinguished novelists as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Julien Green, Marcel Aymé, Jean Genet and Georges Arnaud.

During the 1953-54 Paris theatre year virtually every modern French dramatist of reputation was represented by some new work and the recently concluded season was a lively and controversial one, though certainly not the most brilliant since the war.

The Madeleine Renaud - Jean-Louis Barrault Company, installed at the Marigny for a six-month engagement, unveiled the late Jean Giraudoux last play, *Pour Lucrece*, and gave Paul Claudel's *Christophe Colombe* its first staging.

Anxiously awaited for the past ten years, the Giraudoux piece, a strange, perplexing allegory of sacred and profane love set against a background of Aix-en-Provence during the Second Empire, recounted the history of a modern Lucrece. Though superbly acted by Madeleine Renaud as its tragic heroine, by Edwige Feuillère as the spirit of evil incarnate, and by the late Yvonne de Bray as a conniving brothel madame, it seemed, though a completed play, strangely incomplete, and one suspected that Giraudoux, had he lived, would have rewritten portions of it before permitting its production. Filled with intriguing philosophical spectulations and lyrical writing, it lacked dramatic vitality and its characters refused persistently to come to life.

Claudel's *Colombe*, in itself little more than a poetic outline of the great discoverer's unhappy career as viewed by posterity, was transformed by a production of exquisite simplicity and theatrical resourcefulness into an evening of haunting beauty. During its stay at the Marigny the Renaud-Barrault Company also revived Claudel's *Partage de Midi* and Jean Anouilh's *La Repetition*, both successes of previous seasons.

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Jean-Paul Sartre occupied himself with preparing an adaptation of the century-old Alexandre Dumas melodrama, *Kean*, as an acting vehicle for Pierre Brasseur. The Sartre version retained all the "big scenes" of the original together with its incongruous happy ending, as it was the study of the great actor's dual personality and not the shaky Dumas plot that had drawn Sartre. Lavishly mounted at the Sarah Bernhardt Theatre and employing a company of 40, *Kean* remained such a one-man show that when Brasseur fell ill its run was temporarily interrupted.

There was more dramatic substance to be found in Jean Anouilh's Joan of Arc play, *L'Alouette*, a fresh, imaginative and original view of the martyred saint, touched with familiar Anouilh irony and brilliantly performed by Suzanne Flon as the maid of Orleans and by Michel Bouquet as Charles VII. Claude-Andre Puget and Pierre Bost wrote an arresting Biblical tragedy in *Un Nomme Judas*, and Steve Passeur returned after an absence of five years with *N'Importe Quoi Pour Elle*. This was a tale of frenzied passions at the time of *La Fronde* written in modern dialogue, in which Madeleine Robinson distinguished herself.

Julien Green's second contribution to the drama, *L'Ennemi*, a picture of a crumbling aristocratic household on the eve of the French Revolution, disappointed admirers of his *Sud*, being essentially a play for the library rather than one for the theatre, but there was happy promise in P. A. Breal's *Les Hussards* which recounted the misadventures of two French soldiers in Italy during the Napoleonic campaigns and in Alexandre Rivemale's fantasy *Azouk*, about a white elephant that makes its appearance in a humble provincial home.

Neither Andre Roussin's sinister comedy about a wife's attempts to murder her husband, *Le Mari, La Femme et La Mort* nor Marcel Ayme's *Les Quatre Verités*, which told of a scientist's endeavors to learn his wife's secrets by use of a truth drug, were wholly satisfying, though the former was greatly aided by the presence of Bernard Blier, Jacqueline Gauthier and Fernand René and the direction of Louis Ducreux.

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*La Reine Blanche*, an amusing account of the romance of a concierge's daughter and an African king, by Pierre Barillet and Jean-Pierre Gredy, authors of *Ami-Ami* and *Le Don d'Adèle*, enjoyed mild success, while Jacques Deval's reworking of his 15-year-old comedy *Dans sa Candeur Naive*, *La Manière Forte*, became one of the season's most popular offerings thanks to Robert Lamoureux and Geneviève Page, who undertook the leading roles. A miscast revival of Jacques Natanson's *Le Greluchon Délicat*, a script far superior to Deval's *La Manière Forte*, understandably closed very quickly. Nor was Aramnd Salacrou's *Les Invités du Bon Dieu* to the public liking. Thierry Maulnier's *La Maison de la Nuit*, a rather obvious drama of dark happenings behind the Iron Curtain, had a fair share of success, running on for five months.

Frederic Dard dramatized Guy de Maupassant's *Bel-Ami* as a period costume piece, and Colette translated Anita Loos's dramatization of *Gigi* into French. Pirandello, who has become with Georges Feydeau, oddly enough, the most frequently revived of modern dramatists, was represented by a well-directed production of an early play, *La Volupte de l'Honneur* at the Saint-Georges and by *Vetir Ceux qui sont Nus* at the Petit Marigny.

Many translations of English and American plays appeared during the course of the season, among them Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*—botched in a disasterous staging—Tennessee Williams's *Summer and Smoke*, which had a respectable run at the Œuvre, George Axelrod's *Seven Year Itch*, turned into a vehicle for that able comedian of the cinema and the cabarets, Jean Richard, Terence Rattigan's *The Deep, Blue Sea*, played with winning sincerity by Maseleine Robinson, Patrick Hamilton's murder melodrama, *Rope*, William Saroyan's *My Heart's in the Highlands*, pleasingly done at the Hebertot, J. P. Priestly's *An Inspector Calls*, acted in the round at the Bruyère, and T. S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* in a heavy-handed version at the Vieux-Colombier.

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KENNETH SAWYER

# THE PLASTIC YEAR

THERE is no use pretending it has been a brilliant season. It hasn't, and no amount of sentimental recall can disguise the fact. During the holidays there was some glitter in the pale winter sun, but on closer examination it proved to be only the tinsel on a forest of Christmas trees. Not that there haven't been moments; quite the contrary. A retrospective as important as any Paris has seen in five years, plus a promising *debut* or two and a full scale controversy, seem about all one year can reasonably be expected to hold. But considering the quantity of important work-in-progress in Paris, the plastic *pot-au-feu* was very thin indeed.

The fall provided, among other things, a fairly large Kandinsky show at *Maeght*. Something of a gala, this, since there is a considerable segment of the art world for which the late Wassily Kandinsky could do no wrong (this becomes increasingly apparent with each new exhibition of his 'School'). The *Maeght* selection was fresh and unexpected; most of the canvases had never before been seen in Paris. The major flaw in the show was that the work was decidedly uncharacteristic: the paintings, although done over a fifteen year period, were transitional—an uneasy marriage of organic and geometric forms arranged in fairly conventional patterns within the confines of the frame. While clearly this amounts to no aesthetic crime, it is a misleading view of Kandinsky's important contributions to contemporary sensibility. His early experiments with uncontained composition and explosive, organic forms, his later, mathematical balances were seldom apparent in the collection. The resultant exhibition was more a curiosity than a monument to a great painter.

The Prassinos show at *Galerie de France* ran a dangerous course between art and interior decoration; more often than not art lost out. A nature painter in modern idiom, and

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with a nearly infallible color sense, Prassinos seemed curiously loath to take any chances. His earth, composed of rhythms and mutations, textures and movements, was a very pleasant and painterly place to visit, but I. for one, breathed somewhat deeper in the Dachau of exhaust fumes outside on the Faubourg Saint-Honoré. Probably it is carping to demand some sturdiness in the half-tone charm of Prassinos' world; all the same his art might profit from it.

And how far from the uncompromising intensity of the Dewasne show at *Denise René*. These days all Gaul seems to be divided into *two* parts—geometric and organic—at least for the partisans of abstract painting, and Jean Dewasne seems a splendid rallying point for the geometrists. His blazing, high-tension oils and enamels vibrate from the aluminum on which they are painted. His sculpture—called 'antisculpture', because composed of negative, machine-made forms, painted and rearranged—is audacious and stunning. More important, all his media defy the organicists' cry 'unemotional'; Dewasne is far too shrewd a psychologist for that. Indeed, there is an unexpected, machine-defying humanism in the work; a celebration of conquest on the icy reaches of the *Bauhaus*. Yet even with Dewasne, the final effect seems not different, but simply better, than his origins.

The vast *Salon d'Automne*, officially recognized as a 'public service', was devoted to the artists of the past, through whose work the *Salon* has contributed to the history of world art. The entire exhibition was probably a considerable shock to the *Institut de France*; and perhaps it *isn't* quite playing the game to point out that most of the painting exposed (that word is painfully accurate) was piddling, hopelessly dated stuff, and not at all the gleaming, truth of several golden ages of art. Not quite rugger, perhaps, but encouraging to the youngsters today, who have been too often thrashed with the deathless strokes of the towering dead.

Among art ctitics in Paris there is a strong feeling that to tell the truth about the *Grands Salons* would be downright uncivil. And so it would. The most perfunctory survey of the *Salons des Independents* and *Surindependents*

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inevitably prompts the question: 'Independent (or *Surindependent*) of what?' Usually, the independence is nominal, the painting, 'Sunday'; it pleases few, offends few, and is, I suppose, part of a cherished tradition rather more to be encouraged than denied.

The *Salon de Mai*, perhaps Paris' liveliest annual, is a different matter. Whereas the *Independents* and *Surindependents* are unjuried and free to all, the *Salon de Mai* is invitational and strictly—well, almost strictly—modern. Most of its exhibitors are at least moderately celebrated, and a few, *i.e.*, Picasso, are little short of epochmaking. Yet last year's show was certainly a dismal display despite some excellent British sculpture and a gorgeous oil by Soulages. The fault was largely with the hanging and lighting. Clearly the *Palais de New-York* is a difficult museum to arrange, and probably the Committee managed heroically on a limited budget, but a great part of the difficulty seemed due to carelessness alone. There were unnumbered pieces, paintings askew, burned-out light bulbs, sculpture needlessly jammed together, gravure hung in an almost unlighted hall. Everything, it seemed, conspired to make the show uncompromisingly pedestrian; no mean feat considering the talent represented.

Most disappointing among the season's pretentious productions was the Bernard Buffet exhibition at *Drouant-David*. Despite breathless tantivies by the middlebrow critics, Buffet remains a relatively uninteresting painter. It is difficult to define the pattern of his success. His youth has helped; although still under thirty, he has been a 'name' for five years, and Paris cherishes its prodigies. But there are several other young men with considerably more artistic vitality who remain in the penumbra of gallery activity. True enough, his attutide toward painting is responsible—almost scholarly, in fact, and he drafts and colors skilfully. But, then, who doesn't these days? His composition has received considerable attention, and certainly he works with a sure sense of relationships within his picture plane. But this virtuosity is pretty academic fare; the *Louvre* is full of forgotten masters who arranged every bit as competently.

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Buffet's matter, in this year's show at least, was devoted to caricatures of pasty, middleaged people mildly annoyed to find themselves nude together in stuffy looking rooms. Admirers are titillated to remark that Buffet's people are thinly veiled self-portraits, and the more psychoanalytically minded among them make much of the fact. But there are other facts, as well: Buffet is as immature a painter as he was five years ago and shows very little promise of future development. His oils and drawings have discovered a formula with profound limitations and there they bloodlessly rest.

Not so, however, with Antonio Music. In his winter exhibition at *Galerie de France*, the Dalmation painter abandoned his earlier, Miro influence to explore the muted, spectral worlds of prehistory. Recalling in their forms and unsaturated colors Mousterian cave drawings, the large, disquieting oils seemed dusted with the obscurities of an eon. But in these quieter preoccupations Music has not always succeeded in sustaining his former level of interest; his forms are oversimple, his color balances too even, too atmospheric, for maximum intensity. While realizing that Music had achieved a new stature, I found myself wishing for moments of the former drama.

Nor has the season been without its surprises. I am referring specifically to the Jack B. Yeats exhibition at *Galerie Beaux-Arts*. Outside of Eire, Yeats is best known for his woodcuts in the famous Cuala Press editions. Few of us were prepared for the fresh and shimmering oils that peopled the *Beaux-Arts* with Diarmuid, Maeve, and the singing waters of Bulben. But Yeats is no mere local scenes painter; his gifts, like those of his more renowned brother, have made *use* of legendry, have abstracted that which is seminal from a folk mythology, and created from it an art which is at once as personal as a finger print and as international as the act of love.

And there has been one impressive historical retrospective: Ensor, at the *Musée National d'Art Moderne*. I am not numbered among those who proclaim Ensor the great progenitor of contemporary art. Whatever mutations he may have accomplished in the sensibility of his age, he was no

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technical innovator; and all great revolutions in art must be, basically, technical. No authentic creator can assume intact the sensibility of another, no matter how suggestive it may seem. Yet Ensor remains a fascinating enigma to art historians. His 1879 canvases reveal a taste for the fashionable influences of the peroid: Turner and Whistler, Monticelli and Renoir; but by 1885 his style had begun to change, as if some unseen knot of vipers had hissed him into madness. His figures began to assume the aspect of puppets—strangely malignant puppets—all bent on some nameless, but gruesome mission. His matter became grotesque, bloody, symbolic; his style, previously academic, grew tense and stiff as if with rage. In the seven subsequent years of his painting career he executed a multitude of savage caricatures of his age, eerie with monsters—all scarcely disguised portraits of his contemporaries, and luminous with Christs—self-portraits. And then he ceased to paint. By now he has been called everything from the first *Symboliste* to the first *Fauve*—irresponsibly, to be sure, and the *Musée d'Art Moderne* show has probably not clarified matters. What it did accomplish, however, was perhaps the broadest retrospective of his work that we are likely to have for some time to come.

The *debut* was that of an American, Paul Jenkins, at *Studio Paul Facchetti*—currently the Left Bank's most interesting gallery. Jenkins is a comparatively quiet painter; rather more in the tradition of than influenced by Mark Tobey. His considerable eye is preoccupied with shadows and the rock-firm structures they adumbrate. His palette is striking not only for the nuances he achieves from his half-tones, but for the sharp moment of Venetian color that churns his canvas into life. And with at least one piece, the brilliant '*Phénix jaune*', he seems to be working toward the form beneath form. Mr. Jenkins made no error when he invited Claire Falkenstein to exhibit a group of her minor sculpture with his paintings. Miss Falkenstein, in the four years she has been in Paris, has established herself quietly, but solidly as probably the best younger sculptor in Europe. Her metal pieces, although small, have that monumental quality that

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marks the work of a major artist, and her 'Suns' represent a unique development in contemporary sculpture.

It was a small exhibition and it began quietly enough, but by its closing date most of Paris was well aware that something had happened. How important? Miss Falkenstein's reputation is secure, but Jenkins, as a newcomer to the art scene, is, of course, suspect. There are certain prejudices that bar his way: by present standards he paints small; he uses mostly impermanent media—tempera, gouache, ink; his work has charm as well as strength. But against those skeptics who insist that he has created a fortunate accident in the period style, there is a respectable number who have set aside a ream of paper for next year's show.

But far and away the season's most important event was the huge Dubuffet retrospective presented by René Drouin at the *Cercle Volney*. The exhibition surveyed over two hundred paintings done between 1942 and 1954, plus an impressive selection of drawings, watercolors, and lithographs. As a backward glance at Dubuffet's achievement the show was a stunning success; as a glimpse into the art of our time it was perhaps the most telling picture since the war's end.

Before World War II, Jean Dubuffet was just another bright young man of French painting. His gifts were largely satirical, and his keen sense of line, structure and color placed him in the general tradition of Klee. But in the frenetic days following the peace Dubuffet's painting emerged as one of the most strident manifestations of the total experience of chaos. His savage, thick-impastoed canvases—called '*Art brut*' by both his admirers and his detractors—seemed to say to a world recently done with an orgy of murder: 'This is what man is. He is not beautiful!' His colors, bright and prismatic in 1942, were by 1946 sombre, opaque, ominous; his line, originally clear and distinct, had become blurred, distorted, molten. The work was shocking, but it was also something more. It seemed intent on reconciling the contradictions of beauty and bestiality, love and horror; on discovering a truth to comprehend these paradoxes. And to Dubuffet, truth had no words, only forms—agonized and

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grotesque, humorous and hopeful. In the very latest work the cycle has been completed. Once more the paintings glow with light, once more clarity emerges from the underground landscapes. But today something else is present in Dubuffet's art—something that might be called—to use an unfashionable expression—'sublimity'.

James Johnson Sweeney's recent Young European Painters show at the *Guggenheim* was, at least so far as France is concerned, an accurate picture of the current direction of art in Western Europe. Abstract Expressionism, sometimes called '*Tachisme*'—literally, 'Spot-ism'—in Paris, is unquestionably the most puissant contemporary movement in art. Despite considerable resistance from those who insist that art must be didactic, inspirational, anecdotal, and, above all, recognizable, its comparatively new (at least to the Western World) preoccupations with painted space as continuous and two-dimensional has engaged more and more of the most gifted artists of our time. This may be due, at least in part, to reaction against Cubism and the *Bauhaus*, against the exhausted whimsies of Surrealism and the ideographic art of authoritarian governments. The notions that painting need not necessarily be 'about' anything but itself, that recognizable matter and contained composition are conventions, and like all conventions, are valid only so long as everyone agrees to accept them, have been a salutary challenge to the most imaginative new talents of our time. The result has been the efflorescence of an art sometimes exasperating, but exultant in its freedom and its new-found power. Today there is scarcely a critic or aesthetician prepared finally to deny the importance of this new direction in painting—although, clearly, there are many prepared to deplore it. It seems quite in the scheme of things that the liveiest controversy in the Paris art world today should be over the question of when the new movement first achieved status in France.

Charles Estienne fired the opening shot with his assertion, in *Combat-Art* (March), that his *Salon d'Octobre* of 1952 heralded the break from the more conventional abstraction of the *Salon de Mai*. His announcement was greeted with a hail of

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protests, most notably from Michel Tapié de Céleyran, the distinguished critic, and Georges Mathieu, one of France's most advanced abstractionists, who insisted, and with some justice, that they had accomplished the task four years earlier in a 1948 group show. Others have pointed out that, although there have been individual rebellions from contemporary conventions; namely, those of Kandinsky, Hartung, Hoffman, and a few other solitaries, the movement began in earnest with the American, Mark Tobey's, 'White Writing' gouaches in 1942 and earlier. Still others have maintained that, while it is quite true that other painters have made thrusts in the direction of Abstract Expressionism, it remained for another American, Clyfford Still, to give it both its current forms and its impetus. But Tapié has made a point with which most of his colleagues will agree: that Abstract Expressionism, despite some tentative explorations in that direction by Europeans, finally arrived in France *via* America. And this, I think, implies a new attitude in Europe: America has at last offered a direction in art to which France, at least, has eargerly responded.

In tranquility, the season seems a little brighter than it did at the time; one mercifully forgets the hundred banalities that beleaguered each authentic moment, the walls wailing with pseudo-primitives and fashion designers, neo-Mannerists and poster painters. One has the supreme sense that Paris is Paris: the roundhouse in which art is not to be cornered into a formula or a dictum. But the sins are still present, and this year they were sins of omission; neither the grand old men nor the glittering young have been, to date, adequately represented. Where are Picasso, Rouault, and Braque? Where is the extraordinary new work of Riopelle, Mathieu, Appel, Sam Francis; the sculptors Falkenstein and Martin? These are the forces vital to art today; and our need for them is perhaps greater than ever before.



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# NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

*Fiction*

ITALO CALVINO is considered one of the most gifted of the Italian post-war writers. He is the author of a number of highly-praised books; his work has appeared in all the major literary magazines in the country: *Ponte*, *Botteghe Oscure*, and *Paragone*, among others. He is a senior editor with the Einaudi Publishing House. *Last Comes The Raven* is Mr. Calvino's first appearance in English.

KAY CICELLIS, born in Marseille, France, presently lives in Greece. A book of short stories, *The Easy Way*, and a novel, *No Name in the Street*, have been published both in the U. S. and abroad. Miss Cicellis is working on a new book of short stories and a translation from the Greek of *Eroica* by Kosmos Politis.

CLAUDE-ANTOINE CICCIONE, of Italian parentage, was born in Marseille in 1929. Since 1951 he has lived in Paris. He is a poet, and has written for the theatre, his work notably influenced by Cocteau, Cendras, Dos Passos, and Moravia. *Assunta Parle*, published this month by *Les Editions de la Table Ronde*, is his first novel. The extract printed in this magazine is Mr. Ciccione's first appearance in English.

CHRISTOPHER WANKLYN, a 26 year old Canadian, lives at present in Tangier where he is at work on a novel. A previously published story appeared in *New-Story*. His work has also been read over the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the B. B. C.

*Interview*

ANNA MARIA DE DOMININCIS, born in Italy in 1925, has published verse in a number of Italian reviews. Specializing in American and English literature she is preparing a monograph on Emily Bronte and *Wuthering Heights*, is translating for Einaudi the letters of Emily Dickinson, and for Utet, translating Stephan Crane. BEN JOHNSON has lived in Italy for the past seven years. He has published essays and translations in the *Hudson Review*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *New World Writing*, and a number of other reviews in Europe and the U. S. He is completing a translation of Giose Rimanelli's *Tiro al piccione* to be published by Random House this autumn. He is the translator of *Last Comes The Raven*, the story in this issue by Italo Calvino.

*Chronicle*

MALCOLM COWLEY, who provided the introductory note on Nathan Asch, is the well-known editor and critic, the author of, among other distinguished works, *Exile's Return*.

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*Poetry*

PHILIP BOOTH, who lives in Hanover, New Hampshire, has published poems in *The Hudson Review*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere.

JAMES BROUGHTON, a native of San Francisco, has published two volumes in America: *The Playground*, a verse play, and *Musical Chairs*, a collection of poems. He is more widely known as a maker of poetic experimental films, of which *Mother's Day* and *Loony Tom* have become classics. His most recent film, *The Pleasure Garden*, which he produced in England last year, received a special 'Prix de fantaisie poetique' at the Cannes festival this April. Mr. Broughton at present lives in Paris.

BARNEY CHILDS, a resident of Reno, Nevada, is studying for his doctorate in English at Stanford University. He has studied poetry with Yvor Winters and musical composition with Carlos Chavez.

CECIL HEMLEY is the author of a collection of verse, *Porphyry's Journey*. His work has also appeared in various magazines. He is the editor of The Noonday Press. The poem *The Witnesses* is to appear in Oscar Williams *Pocket Treasury of American Verse*.

DAVID LOUGEE's verse has appeared in *Poetry* (Chicago), *The Sewanee Review*, and *New Directions* 12. In 1952 he was one of the Five Young American Poets chosen by William Carlos Williams to read his work at the Museum of Modern Art. Mr. Lougee is twenty-five.

HELEN NEVILLE's poems and criticism have appeared in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, and elsewhere.

*Commentaries*

THOMAS QUINN CURTISS is at present the theater critic for the Paris edition of the *New York Herald Tribune*. He also contributes to *Variety*.

KENNETH SAWYER, the former poetry editor of *The Hopkins Review*, has published a large number of critical articles here and in the U. S.

EUGENE WALTER is the author of *The Untidy Pilgrim*, a novel published this year by Lippincott. He has written a number of articles on the ballet.

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*Le Gérant et la Directrice :* COLETTE DUHAMEL.

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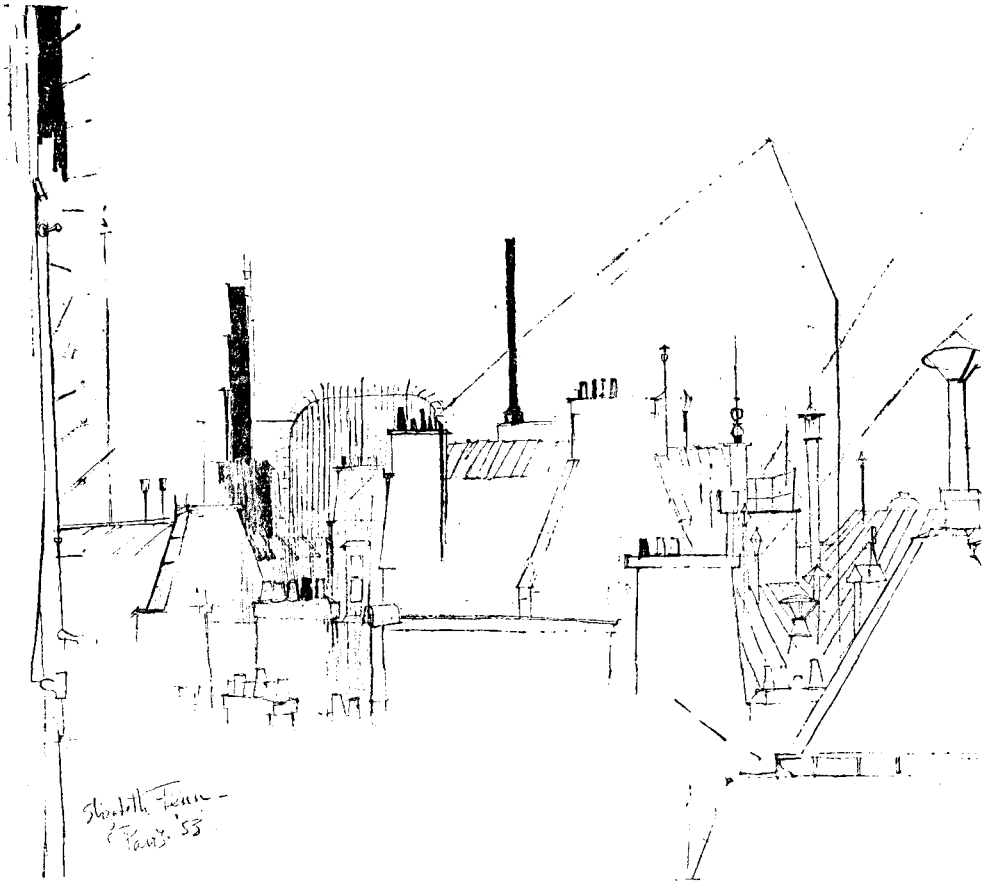

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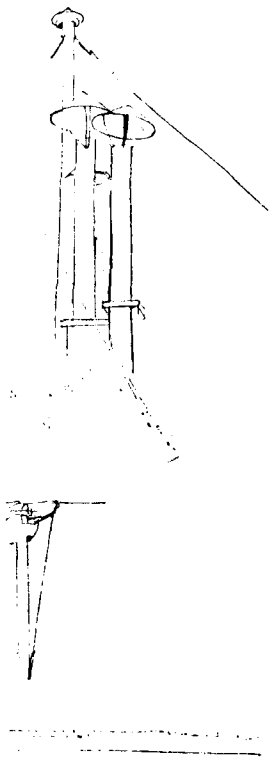

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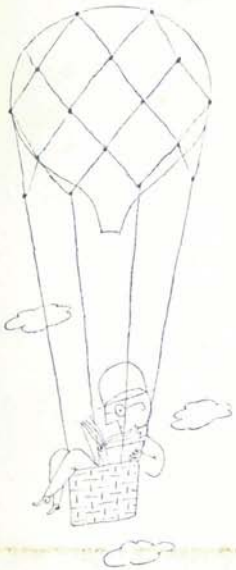

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